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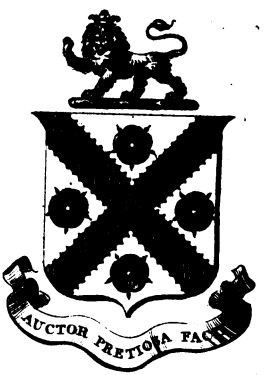

James Lenox.

THE

WORKS

OF

MR. JAMES THOMSON,

WITH HIS LAST

CORRECTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS.

IN THREE VOLUMES COMPLETE.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

PATRICK MURDOCH, D.D. F.R.S.

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CONTENTS

OF THE

THIRD VOLUME.

PAGE.

AGAMEMNON. A TRAGEDY. 1

ALFRED. A MASQUE. 91

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA. A TRAGEDY. . . 133

CORIOLANUS. A TRAGEDY. 237

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AGAMEMNON.

A

TRAGEDY.

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TO

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS

THE PRINCESS OF WALES.

MADAM,

I HUMBLY beg leave to put this Tragedy under the protection of your ROYAL HIGHNESS; and hope you will condescend to accept of it, as a testimony of the most unfeigned and zealous respect, due no less to your amiable virtues, than to your high rank, from,

MADAM,

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS'S

Most dutiful, and

Most obedient humble Servant,

JAMES THOMSON.

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PROLOGUE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF EURYDICE.

SPOKEN BY MR. QUIN.

WHEN this decisive night, at length, appears,
The night of every author's hopes and fears;
What shifts to bribe applause, poor poets try?
In all the forms of wit they court and lye:
These meanly beg it, as an alms; and Those,
By boastful bluster dazzle and impose.
Nor poorly fearful, nor securely vain,
Ours would, by honest ways that grace obtain,
Would, as a free-born wit, be fairly try'd:
And then—let truth and candour, fair, decide.
He courts no friend, who blindly comes to praise;
He dreads no foe—but whom his faults may raise.
Indulge a generous pride, that bids him own,
He aims to please, by noble means, alone;
By what may win the judgment, wake the heart,
Inspiring nature and directing art;
By scenes, so wrought, so rais'd, as may command
Applause, more from the head, than from the hand.
Important is the moral we would teach:
(Oh may this Island practise what we preach!)
Vice in its first approach with care to shun;
The wretch who once engages, is undone.
Crimes lead to greater crimes, and link so streight,
What first was accident, at last is fate;
Guilt's hapless servant sinks into a slave;
And virtue's last sad strugglings cannot save.
" As such our fair attempt, we hope to see
" Our judges here at least from influence free;
" One place—unbias'd yet by party rage,—
" Where only honour votes,—the *Britiſh* stage.
" We ask for justice, for indulgence sue:
" Our last best licence must proceed from you."

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

AGAMEMNON, . . .	MR. QUIN.
EGISTHUS, . . .	MR. MILWARD.
MELISANDER, . . .	MR. CIBBER.
ARCAS, . . .	MR. WRIGHT.
ORESTES, . . .	MR. GREEN.
TALTHYBIUS, Herald, .	MR. HAVARD.

Officers, &c.

CLYTEMNESTRA, .	MRS. PORTER.
CASSANDRA, . . .	MRS. CIBBER.
ELECTRA, . . .	MISS BRETT.
ATTENDANT of Clytemnestra,	MRS. FURNIVAL.

Trojan captives, &c.

SCENE, the palace of AGAMEMNON, in *Mycenæ*.

AGAMEMNON.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

CLYTEMNSETRA *sitting in a disconsolate posture, and her* ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT.

O CLYTEMNESTRA! O my royal mistress!
Can then no comfort soothe your woes a while?
E'er since that flaming signal of sack'd Troy,
That signal fix'd and promis'd by the king,
Was seen some nights ago, nor food has pass'd
Your loathing lips, nor sleep has bless'd your eyes.
Or if perhaps a transient slumber hush'd
Your sighs a moment, and restrain'd your tears;
Sudden, you, starting wildly, would exclaim
Of guilt, Egisthus, Troy, and Agamemnon.
Sure 'tis too much, my queen.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Away! away!
Since my lost state admits of no relief,

To that sad comfort of the wretched leave me,
To yield me to my sorrows.

ATTENDANT.

Hear me, Madam,
Once the dear burden of these aged arms!
My tender care from life's firft opening bud!
My joy! my glory! hear your faithful servant,
And, let me add, your friend.—In reason's eye,
That never judges on a partial view,
Far less than your misfortune is your guilt.——
Your guilt.—Forgive me, 'tis too harsh a word,
For what deserves compassion more than blame.
I know the treacherous ways by which you sunk,
From pleasing peace, to these unhappy fears,
This anxious tumult.——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hide me from the view!
All comfort is in vain.—Away!

ATTENDANT.

Allow me
To plead your injur'd cause against yourself.
When Agamemnon led the Greeks to Troy,
And left you, Madam, for the pomp of war;
Left you the pride of Greece in full-blown beauty,
The kindest mother and the fondest wife;
If Fame says true, for Trojan captives left you—
But that apart.—How did he leave you, say?
Afflicted, out-rag'd, as a queen and mother;
Betray'd to Aulis with your first-born hope,
The blooming Iphigenia, under feint
Of her immediate marriage to Achilles;
And there no sooner at the wind-bound fleet

Arriv'd, but you beheld her spotless blood
Stream on the sully'd altar of Diana,
The price of winds, of a dear-purchas'd gale,
To bear them on to Troy. Thus pierc'd with grief,
Then fir'd by turns to rage, almost to vengeance,
At an ambitious cruel haughty husband;
While all your passions were together mixd,
And ready for a change; was you not left
In a submissive soothing lover's power,
Ordain'd your partner in the sovereign rule,
O'er Argos and Mycenæ, but to you
As pliant still as Agamemnon stately?

CLYTEMNESTRA, *rising.*

Alas! too true! You touch the source of woe.
Why did you leave me, barbarous Agamemnon?
Why leave me weeping o'er a murder'd daughter?
Why helpless leave me to a troubled mind?
Ah! why yourself betray me to a lover?
What arts Egisthus us'd too well I know;
All that can softly steal, or gayly charm,
The heart of woman——Hence, dear sad ideas!
Destroyers hence! And dare you tempt me still,
Perfidious Sirens! in that very moment
When your false charms have wreck'd my peace for ever?
Oh, Nature! wherefore, Nature, are we form'd
One contradiction? the continual sport
Of fighting powers? Oh! wherefore hast thou sown
Such war within us, such unequal conflict,
Between slow reason and impetuous passion?
Passion resistless hurries us away,
Ere lingering reason to our aid can come,
And to upbraid us then it only serves.
Tormentor, cease!

ATTENDANT.

You wrong yourself too much.
Think, Madam, how for years you baffled love:
Nor could Ægisthus, tho' he touch'd your heart,
Tho' many a midnight tear, and secret sigh,
To me, and me alone, disclos'd the pangs
That dimm'd your fading cheek; yet could he not,
With all his arts, his love, submission, charms,
O'ercome the struggling purpose of your soul;
Till Melisander, to a desart isle,
He banish'd from your ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, Melisander!
Given to the beasts a prey, or wilder famine;
Ah, perish'd friend! serene directing light,
By Agamemnon left to guide my counsels;
Whom every science, every muse adorn'd,
While the good honest heart enrich'd them all;
Oh hadst thou still remain'd, then I, this day,
Had been as glorious as I now am wretched!
There breathes a felt divinity in virtue,
In candid unassuming generous virtue,
Whose very silence speaks; and which inspires,
Without proud formal lessons, a disdain
Of mean injurious vice. But lost with him,
With Melisander, reason, honour, pride,
Truth, sound advice, my better genius fled;
I friendless, flatter'd, importun'd and charm'd,
Was left alone with all-seducing love;
Love to the future blind, each sober thought,
Each consequence despising, scorning all,
But what its own enchanting dreams suggest.
What could I do?—Away! self-flattering guilt!

I should have thought, when honour once is sully'd,
Not weeping mercy's tears can wash it clean;
And that one blot on mine diffus'd a stain
O'er the proud honour of a wedded king,
And o'er my children's, my poor blameless children's!
Whose cheeks will kindle at their mother's name:
I should have thought—Would I could think no more!
To think is torture!

ATTENDANT.

What avails it, Madam—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O Melisander! if the dead could hear,
I would invoke thy friendly influence now,
Would wish thee present in this hour of trouble.
Perhaps there is in wisdom, gentle wisdom,
That knows our frailties, therefore can forgive,
Some healing comfort for a guilty mind,
Some power to charm it into peace again,
And bid it smile anew with right affections.
No! fruitless wish!—It cannot, cannot be!
Egisthus who may henceforth give me laws,
Dread of discovery, that worst tyrant, shame,
And my own conscious blotted heart forbid it,
Forbid retreat——

ATTENDANT.

Madam, behold the man,
Who, then upon the watch, observ'd the signal
Of conquer'd Troy, and now attends your orders
To give a full account of what he saw.

SCENE II.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *her* ATTENDANTS, *and the* MAN *who observed the signal.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Are you then sure that you beheld this signal?
Or was it not some vision of the brain,
That painted, while you slept, your waking wish?
Or else perhaps some meteor of the night?

MAN.

Madam, Troy doubtless lies one heap of ruins;
I saw the signal of its fate distinctly.
The night was dark and still. A heavier gloom
Ne'er cover'd earth. In low'ring clouds, the stars
Were muffled deep; and not one ray, below,
O'er all Mycenæ glimmer'd, or around it.
When strait at farthest east, a ruddy light
Sprung up, and, wide increasing roll'd along;
By turns diminish'd, and by turns renew'd,
A wave of fire: at last, it flam'd, confess'd,
From isle to isle, and beachy point to point;
Till the last blaze at Nauplia ended, plain.
A glorious sight, and as a Greek rejoic'd me.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

How sits the wind?

MAN.

It blows from Troy, direct;
A bold and steady gale.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis well. Retire.
Your care and faithful pains shall be rewarded.

SCENE III.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *her* ATTENDANT.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes! he comes! the hapless victor comes!
Even now his trophy'd vessel streaks the main,
And ploughs the billows with triumphant prow;
Or by glad crowds receiv'd, perhaps, he hails
His native shore, and presses on to shame.
Even now with glory charg'd, with conquest gay,
Crown'd with the laurels of ten famous years,
He dreams to join them to the peaceful olive;
And after rugged toils and perilous war,
Soft to repose him on the myrtle bed
Of calm domestic bliss. How vain the hopes!
How short the prospect of believing man!
I dare not look before me, dare not paint
The rising storm.

ATTENDANT.

Behold Egisthus, Madam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Leave me.

SCENE IV.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS.

EGISTHUS, *after some silence.*

And is it thus, O Clytemnestra,
Thus that, in hours of danger, lovers meet?

[*Pausing.*

Still coldly silent, still the look averted,
Where not one softness glows? While anger, fear,
Disgust, and sick repentance, shifting, cloud
Your varied cheek. 'Tis plain you never lov'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh that I never had!

EGISTHUS.

You never did.
The very power to wish it proves you did not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He ne'er deserv'd my love, who dares suspect it.

EGISTHUS.

Not to suspect it, weakness were and folly.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nor only doubt; believe your doubts.

EGISTHUS.

I do.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

You do!

EGISTHUS.

Nay more, am of their truth assur'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis base, ungrateful, an ungenerous insult,
To tell me this. Urge not too far, Egisthus,
Urge not too far my guilt-dejected spirit.
Tho' you have trampled on my haughty virtue,
That noble pride of soul, which knows no fear,
And bears no insult; yet to you, at least,
To you of all mankind, I will be bold,
As I had never err'd, will be a queen,
The blood of Jove, be Clytemnestra still.

EGISTHUS.

Be temperate, Madam: I have told you nothing,
But that I am not worthy of your love.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Curse on that pride! which, with affected brow,
Humility conceals. And am I then so vile,
So lost to reason, honour, common-honour;
As without love, that all-compelling fury,
Without debasing, thoughtless, blind blind love;
To bow me from the height of happy life,
To this low fearful state of coward shame?
Mistake me not—I would not waste one word,
One passing word, affronted thus to save you
From jealousy's worst rage; did not, alas!
A kind of mournful justice to myself
Tear from my swelling heart the mean confession.
How art thou fallen! to what dishonour fallen!
Unhappy Clytemnestra!

EGISTHUS.

Harsh construction!
And yet these frowns delight, that anger charms me.
O more than lovely! O majestic fair one!
Since you then know the jealous force of love,
Forgive its tender fears, its fond offence;
Offence I could not mean.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ill-fated she!
Who must forgive.

EGISTHUS.

Nay, rather cast me from you,
Than thus upbraid me with so forc'd a pardon.

O Clytemnestra where are now those looks,
Those looks of smiling heaven, of radiant sweetness,
That wak'd our morn of love? Within whose sphere,
No evil durst approach, no sadness dwell;
While the charm'd gazer knew nor fear nor danger?
And set they then at last in gloomy quarrels?
Let us not quarrel, why should lovers quarrel?
Life is for that too short, too precious time;
These moments chiefly, these impetuous moments,
That to the brink of ruin seem to roll
Our mingled fate. Even now—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis true! 'Tis true!
Alas! methinks in every hollow blast,
That shakes this palace, Agamemnon comes.
Yes, yes, Egisthus, still a proof remains,
A matchless proof of love, I mean to give you.
Glad will I throw this regal pomp aside,
And, instant, with you seek some distant country,
Some gloomy Thracian dale, where piny Hemus
May wrap us in impenetrable shade!
There, there, the coarsest life, fed by hard toil,
Will be luxurious ease to what I feel,
To this big pang that labours at my heart,
And fires my mingling passions into anguish.
Quick! let us fly, Egisthus, fly this moment!
The next may seize us, bind us down to shame,
Detested shame!

EGISTHUS.

What! Clytemnestra! fly!
That is indeed the road direct to shame,
To infamy for ever. He who flies,
In war or peace, who his great purpose yields,

He is the only villain of this world:
But he who labours firm and gains his point,
Be what it will, which crowns him with success,
He is the son of fortune and of fame,
By those admir'd, those specious villains most,
That else had bellow'd out reproach against him.
Besides your husband, your vain-glorious husband,
Proud Agamemnon, who ten years has warr'd
At Troy, to scourge your sister Helen's rape,
Dream you that he would not pursue our flight,
Tho' we took shelter in Cimmerian shades,
And drag us back, the scorn of hissing Greece,
To then deserv'd, to true, unpity'd shame?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Excuse my weaker heart. But how, Egisthus,
How shall I bear an injur'd husband's eye?
The fiercest foe wears not a look so dreadful,
As does the man we wrong.

EGISTHUS.

Madam, your fears
Cast a false glare upon your troubled reason,
That blinds it quite.—An injur'd husband he!
He wrong'd! No, Clytemnestra never, never,
Can never wrong her tyrant Agamemnon,
Tyrant of common Greece; can never wrong
The man who leaves her ten regardless years,
For the vain honours of a foolish war;
Nay, who consum'd those years, if Fame speaks true,
In nothing less than war; instead of war,
In shameful squabbles with his nobler friends,
About their captive females, training out
An amorous revel rather than a war,
Far from his country, family, and queen.

And can you wrong this false one? Think of Aulis,
How basely to that port you was betray'd,
And what dire nuptials waited there your daughter.
Think with what price he bought his cruel trophies.
Behold the first born blossom of your youth,
Your Iphigenia, her mild eyes dejected,
Her cheek o'ercast with fear, her bosom bare,
An helpless, harmless, uncomplaining victim,
Stabb'd by the murderous Calchas; whilst her father,
Her unrelenting father, to protect
The sacrifice, stands by. Behold, she bleeds,
Pours the rich stream she drew from that fair bosom,
Falls like a drooping flower untimely cut;
And all to purchase for her sire's impatience,
From some fell demon that bely'd Diana,
A rising gale. The gale begins to blow,
The pendants flutter; when away he goes,
Gaily he goes; and leaves a wretched mother
To weep her murder'd child. If yet one spark
Of wonted spirit burns in Clytemnestra,
If she still lives to justice and to nature;
These, these are wrongs that call aloud for vengeance;
And there are hands that boldly—start not, Madam—
That will with pride avenge you.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ha! what hands?
What vengeance, say? Touch not so wild a string;
It wakes new discord in my jarring soul.
To the just gods, not us, pertaineth vengeance.
I cannot, will not, e'er consent to—Gods!
Where roves my tongue?—You did not mention that,
You did not mean it sure—O spare, Egisthus,
In pity spare my last remains of virtue!

Oh make me not beyond recovery vile!
A horror to myself!—how wretched they,
Who feel, yet cannot save, their dying virtue!

[*A shout heard.*

What means this transport of the madning people?
Oh my presaging heart!—Save me!—Again!
Ah! little think they how their joy diſtracts me!

EGISTHUS.

Some move this way—Resume your temper, Madam.

SCENE V.

To CLYTEMNESTRA *an* OFFICER *belonging to the court.*

OFFICER.

Madam the king is near, from Nauplia comes;
But such rejoicing crowds around him throng,
As makes his journey slow. Just now arriv'd
Talthybius brings the news, and craves admittance.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Conduct him hither.

SCENE. VI

CLYTEMNESTRA, *alone.*

Oh too faithful signal!
Now must I take another step in vice.
Down, stubborn heart! and learn diſſimulation:
Yes, learn to ſmile, tho' ſorrow wrap thee round;
Learn to be friends with baſeneſs.—See! how gay
This Herald ſtrides along! Miſtaken man!

SCENE VII.

CLYTEMNESTRA, TALTHYBIUS, *with some* Grecian *soldiers that attend him.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Welcome Talthybius; welcome ye brave Greeks,
How fares the king?

TALTHYBIUS.

Madam, the king is well;
Health, happiness, and glory, join to crown him.
His heart impatient to confer with yours,
Sends me before him with its warmest wishes,
Its warmest gratulations. "Tell," he said,
"Go tell my Clytemnestra, that the thoughts
"Of meeting her awake a dearer joy
"Than conquest ever gave: even tedious seems,
"My people's love, that loses me a moment."
This crown, which circled once the royal brows
Of Hecuba, of Priam's lofty queen,
He prays you to accept.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

There set it down.
I own, Talthybius, the soft moisture fills
My womanish eyes, while on the sudden turns
Of fate I think, on fortune's sad reverses.
Oft when blind mortals think themselves secure,
In height of bliss, they touch the brink of ruin.
But sure your voyage has been wondrous quick,
Not three full days.—Is all the fleet return'd?

TALTHYBIUS.

No, Madam; none, except this single ship,
Which bore the king: the rest are scatter'd wide.
When to the joyous breeze we spread our sails,
And left that bay, where Simois and Scamander
Mix with the rapid Hellespont; while Troy,
Or what was Troy, yet wreathing smoke to heaven,
And Ida's woody top, receding, sunk
Beneath the trembling main, the sky was fair;
And, wing'd our course with slender airs, we sail'd,
Till strait, as evening fell, the fluttering gale,
Encreasing gradual from the red north-east,
Blew stiff and fierce. At last the tempest howl'd.
Next morning, nought but angry seas and skies
Appear'd, conflicting, round. Mean time, right on,
Our strong-ribb'd vessel drove before the blast,
That, falling somewhat of it's fury, gave us
A quick auspicious voyage. Safe, we pass'd
The Cyclad isles, that, o'er the troubled deep,
Seem'd then to float amidst the mingling storm.
Only at one, with much ado, we touch'd,
Nor without risque.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And why?

TALTHYBIUS.

Madam, compell'd
By sacred pity. On the foaming beach,
A miserable figure beck'ning stood,
Horrid and wild, with famine worn away.
His plaintive voice, half by the murmuring surge
Absorpt, just reach'd our ears. In Greek he call'd,
And strong adjur'd us by the gentle gods,
That make the wretched their peculiar care,

To bear him thence, from savage solitude,
Into the cheerful haunts of men again.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What?—Of condition look'd he?

TALTHYBIUS.

So he seem'd;
Tho' dimm'd by helpless solitary life.
The king regards him much—Forgive me, Madam;
I see the rueful image but disturbs
Your generous soul.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I thank you, good Talthybius;
And from the king himself will learn the rest.
This ring, on which a victory is carv'd
With curious art, befits the news you bring.
I am your debtor still; and, soldiers, yours.

ACT II. SCENE I.

CLYTEMNESTRA, ATTENDANT.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

ARRIV'D so soon! I am not half prepar'd:
My features all are sunk with conscious shame;
My eyes are yet too tender to dissemble.

ATTENDANT.

Madam, be firm. Wipe off these gloomy tears,
In which too plain is read your troubled soul.
Just now the trumpet spoke the king's approach.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis come, at last, the trying hour is come!
Oh that my heart were hard, and features false!—
Again these trumpets swell——

ATTENDANT.

A moment, Madam,
A moment will betray you.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Open, Earth,
And swallow up my shame!—What can I do?
Where look? what say? confusion! torture!

ATTENDANT.

Madam——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, coward that I am! Was there no dagger
To save this tenfold death?

ATTENDANT.

Hark! loud and near,
The triumph comes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Well—give me breath——
[*Endeavouring to compose her agitation.*

AGAMEMNON, *behind the Scenes.*

A moment
Leave me, my friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ha! heard you not his voice?
Yes, yes, 'tis he! Go bring my children hither:
They may relieve me.

ATTENDANT.

O remember!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Heavens!

SCENE II.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA.

AGAMEMNON.

Where is my life! my love! my Clytemnestra!
O let me press thee to my fluttering soul,
That is on wing to mix itself with thine!
O thou, for whom I live, for whom I conquer,
Than glory brighter! O my Clytemnestra!
Now, in this dear embrace, I lose the toils
Of ten years war! absence, with all its pains,
Is by this charming moment wip'd away.

All-bounteous gods! Sure, never was a heart
So full, so blest as mine.— [*Discovering her disorder.*
But whence, my fairest!
What mean these tears?—Not tears of happy love,
Such as I shed.—What means that clouded look,
Whose downcast sweetness will not shine upon me?
Why this cold meeting? Why unkindly damp'd
My ardor thus? Oh speak, my Clytemnestra!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Forgive me, Agamemnon; but I cannot,
Alas! I cannot see your face again,
Without reflecting where I saw you last.
Aulis is present to my eyes anew,
The ships, the chiefs, the guards, the bloody Calchas,
All the dire pomp of sacrifice around:
Anew my daughter bleeds, basely deceiv'd!
And when I see that awful brow, that doom'd her,
Can Agamemnon wonder at my tears?

AGAMEMNON.

Why will my Clytemnestra add new stings
To what here rankles but too deep already?
Ah! why impute to me the work of Fate?
'Tis not indulging private inclination,
The selfish passions, that sustains the world,
And lends its rulers grace; no, 'tis not thence
That glory springs, and high immortal deeds:
The public good, the good of others, still
Must bear fond nature down, in him who dares
Aspire to worthy rule; imperious honour
Still o'er the most distinguish'd lords it most.
Was it for me?—Let even your passions judge—
For Agamemnon was it, when ordain'd,
By common voice, the general of the Greeks;

While twenty kings beneath my banner march'd;
And while around me full-assembled Greece,
Indignant, kindled at your sister's rape,
On her old native foe demanding vengeance,
On faithless Asia: Was it then for me,
To quench this glorious flame? And to refuse
One life to thousands, to those generous thousands,
That for my honour, for the dearer honour
Of Clytemnestra's family, stood all
Prepar'd to die? If to the mingled voice,
Of honour, duty, glory, public good,
Of the commanding gods, I had been deaf;
And, in the feeble father, poorly sunk
The Greek, the chief, the patriot, and the king,
Greater than king, the general of the Greeks;
Then you yourself, my Clytemnestra's self,
Must (let her heart avow the truth) have scorn'd me.
Nor think it was an easy resignation.
Oh Clytemnestra! Had you seen within,
What here within my tortur'd bosom pass'd;
To that my battles since were only sport.
No, not the kindest mother, bath'd in tears,
As o'er her agonizing babe she hangs,
Feels what I suffer'd then—You may remember—
Again the father melts me at the thought—
You may remember how I hid my face;
Asham'd to let the Greeks around behold
The tears, that misbecame their general's cheek.
Then cease to blame what rather merits pity,
I might add praise.—He, who the father's heart
More tender has than mine, too tender has it.
I love my children, as a father should;
Besides, I love them from a softer cause,
I love my Clytemnestra.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Had, alas!
Had Agamemnon lov'd me, would he, nay,
Could he have left me in the rage of grief,
My daughter yet fresh bleeding in my sight?
Left me so long? love surely must have found,
In the wide round of ten revolving years,
Some way to see me, to prevent these sorrows—
Why was I thus abandon'd, Agamemnon?

AGAMEMNON.

Let me kiss off these tears. O beauteous tears!
If shed by doubting love, if shed for absence.
Instead of these reproaches, ask me rather,
How I that absence bore: and here all words,
All eloquence is dumb, to speak the pangs,
That lurk'd beneath the rugged brow of war.
When glaring day was clos'd, and hush'd the camp,
Oh! then, amid ten thousand other cares,
Those stung the keenest that remember'd thee,
That on my long-left Clytemnestra thought,
On what wild seas and mountains lay between us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Unhappy man!

AGAMEMNON.

What says my Clytemnestra?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Unhappy mortals! by vain words deceiv'd,
To their own pride, to joyless honour slaves.

AGAMEMNON.

He, he, alone, can claim a right to bliss,
Who has fulfill'd the painful task of honour.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But what avails a right to vanish'd bliss?

AGAMEMNON.

Let me once more adjure thee, Clytemnestra,
By every tender name of love adjure thee,
To lose in kind oblivion these our past—
I would not call them quarrels—Ah! there was,
There was a time—I will indulge the thought—
When everlasting transport tun'd our souls:
When join'd to vernal life, the spring of love
Around us gaily blow'd! and heaven and earth,
All smiling nature look'd delighted on.
Yet, would my Clytemnestra lend her aid,
I know a passion still more deeply charming
Than fever'd youth e'er felt; and that is love,
By long experience mellow'd into friendship.
How far beyond that froward child of fancy!
With beauty pleas'd a while, anon disgusted,
Seeking some other toy; how far more noble
Is this bright offspring of unchanging reason,
That fonder grows with age, and charms for ever!
It is not often, Clytemnestra, thus,
That I submit to double my entreaties;
But, oh destroy not the collected hopes
Of life and love! Oh make not conquest hateful!
I shall abhor it, if it cost me thee,
Cost me thy love. A daughter was too much,
And ten years absence from my Clytemnestra.
Add not to these a loss I cannot bear,
The loss of thee, thou loveliest of thy sex!
And once the kindest!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh!

AGAMEMNON.

Turn not away;
There is relenting goodness in thy look.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Alas! untimely fondness—Agamemnon!
Too generous Agamemnon! you distress me.
Would you were not so kind, so tender, now!
Or ne'er had been so cruel!

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis unjust
To call me cruel. Fate, the Gods, our fortune
Were cruel to us both—What could I more
To sooth our parting woes, and ease my absence?
I left you Melisander to advise you,
Left you the wisest, faithfullest and best—
Oh whispering nature! Are not these my children?

SCENE III.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, ORESTES.

AGAMEMNON.

My daughter! my Electra!

ELECTRA.

O my father!

AGAMEMNON.

Come to my arms, my boy! my dear Orestes!
In whom I live anew, my younger self!
And thou, Electra! in thy opening cheek

SCENE V.

AGAMEMNON, EGISTHUS.

EGISTHUS.

Health to Agamemnon!
And happiness responsive to his glory!

AGAMEMNON.

Cousin, I greet you well.

EGISTHUS.

Forgive me, Sir.
You have surpriz'd us with this quick return:
For by that signal, whose illustrious flame
Rejoic'd all Greece, we did not hope your presence
These three days hence. Forgive, that, unprepar'd,
We only with that joy, that loyal transport,
Which swell each Grecian bosom, thus receive you.
And truly such a burst I have not seen
Of that best triumph. City, country, all,
Is in a gay triumphant tempest tost.
I scarce could press along. The trumpet's voice
Is lost in loud repeated shouts that raise
Your name to heaven. Ten thousand eyes, below,
Ake to behold the conqueror of Troy.

AGAMEMNON.

The noblest praise that can salute my ear,
The sweetest music, is my people's joy.
But sure your tongue has done it ample justice;
Trust me, you blazon a description well.
I have not heard so much obliging speech
These many years.

EGISTHUS.

Misconstrue not my zeal:
On the full heart obedient language waits.
I feel so deep your glory, Agamemnon,
As mingles with my joy a sort of passion,
That almost touches envy. O ye gods!
Has, while I liv'd, a war the most renown'd
Which any age e'er saw, or shall again
Be seen; a war, whose never-dying fame
Will cover earth, and reach remotest time,
Has such a war adorn'd my days, and I
Not shar'd it's glory? Pining here, unknown,
In nameless peace—how have I lost my life?

AGAMEMNON.

This ardor is the mode. But know, Egisthus,
That ruling a free people well in peace,
Without or yielding or usurping power;
Maintaining firm the honour of the laws,
Yet sometimes softening their too rigid doom,
As mercy may require; steering the state,
Thro' factious storms, or the more dangerous calms
Of peace, by long continuance grown corrupt;
Besides the fair career which Fortune opens
To the mild glories of protected arts,
To bounty, to beneficence, to deeds
That give the gods themselves their brightest beams:
Yes, know that these are, in true glory equal,
If not superior, to deluding conquest:
Nor less demand they conduct, courage, care,
And persevering toil.

EGISTHUS.

Say, thankless toil,
Harsh and unpleasing; that instead of praise
And due reward, meets oftner scorn, reproach,
Fierce opposition to the clearest measures:
Injustice, banishment, or death itself:
Such is the nature of malignant man.
Not so the victor's meed: him all approve,
Him all admire.

AGAMEMNON.

Yet tho' a toilsome task,
Tho' an ungrateful labour oft to rule;
I not so hardly of mankind, Egisthus,
Presume to judge. Truth, wisdom, courage, justice,
Beneficence, and for the public good
A constant tenor of well laid designs,
Must still be awful in the worst of times,
Be amiable, dear; while worth, at last,
Will light up worth, and virtue kindle virtue.
You was however eas'd of half the toil,
By him I left to counsel Clytemnestra,
By Melisander.

EGISTHUS.

Would to heaven I had!

AGAMEMNON.

You much amaze me.—Is not Melisander
Wise, just, and faithful?

EGISTHUS.

Sir, I must confess
He wore a specious mask——

AGAMEMNON.

Beware, Egisthus;
I know his stedfast worth, and will not bear
The farthest hint that stains the man I love.

EGISTHUS.

Then urg'd by truth, and in my own defence,
I boldly will assert him, Agamemnon,
To be more apt to trouble and embroil,
Than serve a state. A certain stubborn virtue,
I would say affectation of blunt virtue,
Beneath whose outside froth, fermenting lay
Pride, envy, faction, turbulence of soul,
And democrative views, in some sort made him
A secret traitor, equally unfit
Or to obey or rule. But that I check'd
His early treasons, here at your return,
You might have found your kingdom a republic.

AGAMEMNON.

O I shall lose all patience!— [*Aside.*
You do well,
To give your accusation open speech.
Meantime, remember you must fully prove it,
You must!—And he who Melisander proves
The wretch you have describ'd, proves man is vain,
And saps the broad foundations of all trust.
I know he would not patiently look on,
And suffer ill designs to gather strength,
Awaiting gentle seasons; yes, I know,
He had a troublesome old fashion'd way
Of shocking courtly ears with horrid truth.
He was no civil ruffian; none of those,
Who lie with twisted looks, betray with shrugs——
I wax too warm—But he was none of those,

Is none of those dust-licking, reptile, close,
Insinuating, speckled, smooth court-serpents,
That make it so unsafe, chiefly for kings,
To walk this weedy world—Pardon my heat—
I wander from the purpose—You, Egisthus,
Must prove your charge, to Melisander's face
Must prove it.

EGISTHUS.

Surely—Since the princely faith
Of your own blood you doubt——

AGAMEMNON.

Friendship and truth
Are more a-kin to me than blood.

EGISTHUS.

You shall,
You shall have proof; but to his face you cannot.

AGAMEMNON.

But to his face I will!—I cannot! why?

EGISTHUS.

He wanders far from hence, I know not where:
For when I found him an undoubted traitor,
Tho' he the heaviest punishment deserv'd;
Yet in regard to that esteem, which, once,
You deign'd to bear him, banishment alone
Was all I did inflict.

AGAMEMNON.

I thank you, Sir—
O you are wondrous good!—But tell me, how,
How durst you meddle in the sphere assign'd
To Clytemnestra? He was left to her;
To be her counsellor I left my friend,

Left Melisander; left a man, whom long,
Whom well I knew! perhaps to check you, left him:
And you pretend, you!—But I will be calm—
These passions in a king to his inferiors,
Who cannot answer equal, are not comely.
Forgive my transport—A more quiet hour
Shall sift this matter to the bottom, shall
Do Melisander or Egisthus justice.

SCENE VI.

EGISTHUS.

Now go thy way, weak, openhearted man,
Thus to declare the ruin thou intendest.
Go, rate thy Trojan slaves; and elsewhere practise
This insolence of camps. Tame, as I seem,
Submissive, mild, and patient of thy threats;
Yet, ere to-morrow's sun beholds Mycenæ,
My sure-aim'd blow shall pierce thy swelling heart,
And cool this tyrant fever in thy veins.
Were not our blood, our kindred blood at variance,
And therefore burning with immortal hate;
Had not thy father Atreus, at a banquet,
A dreadful banquet! from whose sight the sun
Turn'd back eclips'd, serv'd—Monstrous!—up to mine,
To his own brother, to the pale Thyestes,
His murder'd sons: didst thou not wear a crown
Then by thy father ravish'd from our line,
Mycenæ's crown, which he unjustly seiz'd,
And added to his own, to that of Argos:
Had I not stain'd thy bed with Clytemnestra:
Tho' safety did not urge, and self-defence:

Yet this vile treatment, treatment fit for slaves;
Thanks to thy fury! this has fix'd thy doom.
Some foolish scruples, that still hung about me,
Are by this friendly tempest blown away.——
But Clytemnestra comes. How shall I calm
Her troubled mind? How bring her to my purpose?

SCENE VII.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Here let me kneel, Egisthus, grasp thy knees;
Here let me grow till my request be granted.
Now is the very crisis of my fate.

EGISTHUS.

What sight is this I see? Rise, Clytemnestra!
Thou fairest, most majestic of thy sex!
It misbecomes thee much this suppliant posture.
O there is nothing, nothing, sure, which you
Need stoop to ask! Speak, and command it, Madam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then let us henceforth be, as if this love
Had never been betwixt us.

EGISTHUS.

Cease to love thee!
What wild demand! Impossible!—Even now
Endear'd by danger, by distress endear'd,
I for thee feel a fonder pang, than e'er
I felt before.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No! these deluding words
Can charm no longer; their enchantment flies;
And in my breast the guilty passions jar,
Unkind, unjoyous, unharmonious all.
Ah me! from real happiness we stray,
By vice bewilder'd; vice which always leads,
However fair at first, to wilds of woe.

EGISTHUS.

Ah! Clytemnestra! didst thou love——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No more!
Seduce my soul no more! Here will I stop——
Beyond this line 'tis misery, 'tis madness.
The furies flash their torches, vultures tear,
The mingled tortures of the damn'd await me.
Oh! if your passion be not merely selfish,
If the least tenderness for me you feel,
Drive me no farther down the gulph of woe!
To happiness I bid a last farewel;
I ask not happiness: no, that I leave
To innocence and virtue; peace, alone,
Some poor remains of peace is all I ask,
Not to be greatly wretched, plung'd in horrors!
And yet who knows, the heavenly spark, that sleeps
Beneath these embers, yet may spread anew
Its chearful lustre—All may yet be well——
For Agamemnon was so kind, so gentle,
With such a holy tender flame he burn'd,
As might have kindled in a barbarous breast
Humanity and virtue.

EGISTHUS.

All pretence.
I guess his aim! I penetrate his purpose.
On you he lavish'd fondness, while on me
He lowr'd destruction. Doubtless, with his ear
Some villain has been busy; and he means
First to divide us, then with greater ease,
To ruin both—And can you then be caught,
Caught with the common prostituted speeches,
That oft have sickn'd on the glowing lip
Of many a Trojan slave? Chryseïs had them;
Briseïs too; and now Cassandra, she,
Who, more like a triumphant queen than captive,
Is every hour expected——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What Cassandra?

EGISTHUS.

O it imports you little what Cassandra!
Thus poorly tame you ne'er will want Cassandras.
What is become of Clytemnestra's spirit,
That she can thus forget her high descent,
Forget her rank, her honour, nay forget
Her injuries?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But what Cassandra, say?

EGISTHUS.

Why, Priam's daughter! the prophetic princess,
The proud, the young, the beautiful Cassandra:
So vain of heart, she dreamt Apollo lov'd her,
And, on her plighted faith to crown his love,
Bestow'd the gift of prophecy; the gift

In her possession, she deceiv'd the god;
Whence he, provok'd, with this condition dash'd it,
Of never gaining credit. So the tale,
The fable runs—Yet on my soul, I think,
Did she give out, she would be queen of Argos,
She were indeed a prophetess.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis well.
You mean it for an insult this, you do.
What else could tempt you to deride me, Sir,
With such extravagance?

EGISTHUS.

Mistake me not,
I mean it, Madam, for a serious truth,
I mean it for a certainty, if thus
You droop, unnerv'd with these dejecting fears.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Cassandra queen of Argos!

EGISTHUS.

Yes of Argos;
While Clytemnestra in a prison pines;
Where she may weep and moralize at leisure.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By Heavens! she visits first her father's shade.

EGISTHUS.

There shone your native self. Let bright revenge,
I should say justice, dissipate these clouds,
These melancholy whims of ill-judg'd virtue,
And shew you burning with your former lustre.
Madam, our fates are blended: know, we stand
Or fall together. Shame, contempt, and ruin,

Or safety, love, and glory, is our choice.
And can we doubt a moment?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But Egisthus—

EGISTHUS.

I know the purpose of thy pleading eye.
Of that hereafter—We shall meet again——
My presence now is wanted in the city.
Fear nothing—Thou shalt know before we act,
Thou for whose sake alone I act and live!

ACT III. SCENE I.

ARCAS, MELISANDER.

ARCAS.

AND have I found my long lost friend again?
My Melisander! But so chang'd your look,
So sickly with a kind of thoughtful sadness,
So sunk each feature, by seven drooping years
Spent in that desert isle, as baffled quite
My wandering recollection.

MELISANDER.

True, dear Arcas:
For what a helpless creature, by himself,
Is the proud lord of this inferior world,
Vain feeble man! The commoners of nature,
Each wing that flits along the spacious sky,
Is less dependant than their boasting master.
Hail social life! into thy pleasing bounds
Again I come, to pay the common stock
My share of service; and, in glad return,
To taste thy comforts, thy protected joys.

ARCAS.

O greatly welcome! you deserve them well,
You well deserve the social life you polish.
Still on my thought your strange delivery dwells.
By Agamemnon left to aid the queen
With faithful counsel, while he warr'd at Troy;
And thus by Agamemnon to be sav'd,
Returning from that conquest! wondrous chance!
Or rather wondrous conduct of the gods!
By mortals, from their blindness, chance misnam'd.

Mean time, instruct me, while the king reposes,
How was you snatch'd away? and how, so long,
Could you this dreadful solitude support?
I burn to know the whole.

MELISANDER.

'Tis thus, my friend.
While sunk in unsuspecting sleep I lay,
Some midnight ruffians rush'd into my chamber,
Sent by Egisthus, who my presence deem'd
Obstructive (so I solve it) to his views;
Black views I fear, as you perhaps may know.
Sudden they seiz'd, and muffled up in darkness,
Strait bore me to the sea, whose instant prey
I did conclude myself, when first, around
The ship unmoor'd, I heard the chiding wave.
But these fell tools of cruel power, it seems,
Had orders in a desart isle to leave me;
There hopeless, helpless, comfortless, to prove
The utmost gall and bitterness of death.
Thus malice often overshoots itself,
And some unguarded accident betrays
The man of blood.—Next night—a dreary night!
Cast on the wildest of the Cyclad Isles,
Where never human foot had mark'd the shore,
These ruffians left me—Yet believe me, Arcas,
Such is the rooted love we bear mankind,
All ruffians as they were, I never heard
A sound so dismal as their parting oars.——
Then horrid silence follow'd, broke alone
By the low murmurs of the restless deep,
Mixt with the doubtful breeze, that now and then
Sigh'd thro' the mournful woods. Beneath a shade
I sat me down, more heavily oppress'd,
More desolate at heart, than e'er I felt

Before. When Philomela, o'er my head,
Began to tune her melancholy strain,
As piteous of my woes; till by degrees,
Composing sleep on wounded nature shed
A kind but short relief. At early morn,
Wak'd by the chaunt of birds, I look'd around
For usual objects: objects found I none,
Except before me stretch'd the toiling main,
And rocks and woods, in savage view, behind.
Wrapt for a moment in amaz'd confusion,
My thought turn'd giddy round; when all at once,
To memory full my dire condition rush'd.

ARCAS.

But of each comfort, each convenience void,
How could you life sustain? how fence against
Inclement skies?

MELISANDER.

A mossy cave, that fac'd
The southern sea, and in whose deep recess
Boil'd up a crystal fountain, was my home.
Herbs were my food, those blessed stores of health!
Only when winter from my daily search
Withdrew my verdant meal, I was oblig'd
In faithless snares to seize, which truly griev'd me,
My sylvan friends; that ne'er till then had known,
And therefore dreaded less the tyrant man.
But these low hardships scarce deserve regard:
The pangs, that sharpest stung, were in my mind;
There desolation reign'd; and there, cut off
From social life, I felt a constant death.
And yet these pangs at last forgot to throb:
What cannot lenient gentle time perform?
I ate my lonely meal without a tear;

Nor sigh'd to see the dreadful night descend.
In my own breast, a world within myself,
In streams, in groves, in sunny hill and shade;
In all that blooms with vegetable life,
Or joys with kindred animal sensation;
In the full peopled round of azure heaven;
Whene'er I, studious, look'd, I found companions.
But, chief, the muses lent their softning aid.
At their enchanting voice my sorrows fled,
Or learn'd to please; while, thro' my troubled heart,
They breath'd the soul of harmony anew.
Thus of the great community of Nature
A denizen I liv'd; and oft, in hymns,
And rapturous thought, even with the gods convers'd,
That not disdain sometimes the walks of man.
So pass'd the time, when, lo! within my call,
Arriv'd the ship, which hope had often promis'd—
The ship!—O it surpass'd my fondest dream,
E'er to imagine the gay ship that came!
As on the deck I Agamemnon saw,
All glorious with the spoils of conquer'd Troy;
Ye gods! what transport, what amazement seiz'd me!
What adoration of your wondrous ways!
Expression sinks beneath them.

ARCAS.

Sweet reward
Of manly patience! that, to fortune still
Superior, scorns despair.

MELISANDER.

This theme, my friend,
Will better suite a leisure hour; but now
The high concerns of life demand our care.

I have already to the king imparted
Suspicions of Egisthus, and remain
In this disguise, not to alarm his guilt,
Till it more full appear, and proper steps,
To puniſh his misgovernment be taken.
If he has ill designs, you, Arcas, you
Must, while you seem'd regardless, have discern'd them.
Your calm but keen inspection, not disturb'd
By the vain flutter of ill-tim'd discourse,
Must reach the very bottom of his purpose.
In you the king confides, of you demands,
As of his best lov'd subject in Mycenæ,
The truth.

ARCAS.

O, I have precious truths in store!
And that best treasure will unlock before him.
Long has my silent observation trac'd
Egisthus, thro the doubling maze of treason;
But now his ill designs are too, too plain,
To all Mycenæ plain; and who, indeed,
Who can have good ones that corrupts a people?
It was however, hard, a bitter taſk!
To wink at public villainy; to wipe
Each honest passion from my livid face,
To bind my hands, and seal my quivering lips,
While my heart burn'd with rage, and treasur'd up
A storm of indignation——

MELISANDER.

Give it way!
O 'tis a glorious luxury! Oppress'd,
For years beneath a load of wicked power,
To heave it off indignant, and assert
The dear dear freedom of a virtuous mind.

The bravest blood of Greece to shelter such;
And to assert their honour who have none?
But what can this perfidious, this Egisthus,
What can he say, by such loose rule propose?
Is it his native bent? or does he push
Some dark design, by these detested means?

ARCAS.

There is no vice a stranger to his heart,
Conceal'd beneath refin'd dissimulation;
Dissimulation, that on you yourself
Impos'd. Meantime, Sir, his outrageous views
Invade the throne of Argos and Mycenæ.

AGAMEMNON.

Said you the throne of Argos and Mycenæ?
Already have I lost my noblest throne,
If he has robb'd me of my people's virtue;
'Tis but vain pomp, a tyrant's toy, the other.
And dares he bear a giddy look so high,
As to my throne? The villain! sure he dares not!

ARCAS.

Nay, more, my lord—He scales the dazzling height,
And almost grasps with impious hands your sceptre.

AGAMEMNON.

To touch it is perdition!—What! Egisthus!
Egisthus seize my throne!

ARCAS.

So means the traitor.

AGAMEMNON.

That creature of my power! that insect! rais'd
By the warm beams of my mistaken bounty!
Whom, when my father's vengeance raz'd his race,

I sav'd, train'd up, with favours, honours heap'd;
And trusted in his hands at last a jewel,
Too precious for the faithless heart of man—
O gross gross blindness!—Half my kingly power!
Ay, there breaks out his father's treacherous blood!
There, there, too late, I find the base Thyestes!
Forgive me, Atreus! Oh my royal father!
Forgive my trusting thus the seed of him,
Of an abhorr'd, an execrable brother,
Who even profan'd thy bed—But, ere yon orb
Shall from the purpled ocean rise again,
Oh injur'd Atreus! by thy sacred shade
I swear, to make for this a full atonement.
Is then this people, Arcas, grown so vile,
So very vile, that he dares entertain
The smallest hope to rival me in empire?
I like not vaunting—But, ungrateful people!
Can you prefer a nameless thing to me?
Am I not rough with scars on your account?
And for the careful love I always bore you,
Your father nam'd? And yet prefer to me,
One who ne'er saw the glorious front of war,
For nothing famous but corrupting peace,
And whose sole merit was my ill-judg'd favour?
Can you?—Away!—Dishonour stains the thought!
How should this be?

ARCAS.

Not many, Sir, stand fix'd
On the deep principles of reason'd virtue,
Whom time nor steals, nor passion bears away.
Mankind, in general, float along the stream
Of custom, good or bad; and oft the mind
To that familiar grows, by gradual use
And still encroaching vice, whose first regard

Gave horror. Hence ten loosely-govern'd years
Have wrought such strange events, that you no more
Behold your ancient Argos and Mycenæ.
These cities now with slaves and villains swarm.
At first, Egisthus, popular and fair,
All smiles and softness, as if each man's friend,
By hidden ways proceeded, mining virtue:
He pride, he pomp, he luxury diffus'd;
He taught them wants, beyond their private means:
And strait, in bounty's pleasing chains involv'd,
They grew his slaves. Who cannot live on little,
Or as his various fortunes shall permit,
Stands in the market ready to be sold.

AGAMEMNON.

O damn'd detested traffic!—But proceed.

ARCAS.

While the luxurious fever thus increas'd,
Still, in proportion as it gather'd rage,
He lent it fewel: and, more bold, disclos'd
His noon-day treason. Murmurs went about,
And spread at last into the common talk,
That you was proud, severe, beneath the notion
Of holding firm the helm of state, a tyrant;
That in vain wars, which nought imported them,
You spent their treasure, shed their noblest blood;
And that, Troy conquer'd once, to her rich plains
You meant from Argos to transplant your empire.
Mean time, in private, all, whom wild debauch
Has set adrift from every human tie;
Whom riot, want, and conscious guilt inflame,
Holding the gods and virtue in contempt,
Amidst their bowls; such are his bosom-friends:
And join'd to them, a meaner ruffian band,

Of villains bold in crimes, whose trade is murder,
Hang in black clouds around him; whence, I fear,
A sudden tempest is prepar'd to burst.
This, Sir, from duty and a faithful zeal,
I plain unfold: nor on my word, alone,
Believe these accusations; clear as day,
I for them will produce the strongest proof.

AGAMEMNON.

I thank thee, Arcas. Truth, tho' sometimes clad
In painful lustre, yet is always welcome,
Dear as the light that shews the lurking rock:
'Tis the fair star that, ne'er into the main
Descending, leads us safe thro' stormy life——
Gods! how it tears me from each calmer thought!
To think this traitor, that this double traitor,
This traitor to myself and to my people,
Should by such sneaking, such unmanly ways,
Thus filch away my crown!——
Why stand I chafing here? One timely deed
Is worth ten thousand words—Come then, my friends,
Come and behold me seize amidst his guards,
His coward guards—Guilt ever was a coward—
This rival-king, and with him crown my triumph.
Till then Troy smokes in vain, and Agamemnon
Cannot be said to conquer.

MELISANDER.

Sir, beware——

AGAMEMNON.

Of what beware? Where am I, Melisander?
Am I not in Mycenæ? in my palace?
Are not these crowds, that stream along the streets,
My subjects all? Of what should I beware?

Not seize a traitor in my own dominions!
Yes, I will seize him, Melisander,—will!

MELISANDER.

What grace to kings such generous ardor gives!
But tho' brave deeds be warm at first conceiv'd,
Let the best purpose cool, nor miss your blow.
More firm and sure the hand of courage strikes,
When it obeys the watchful eye of caution.
You hear from Arcas, Sir, what ruffian bands,
What secret deaths, what daggers lurk around him;
Be cautious then; for virtue's, glory's sake!
And, when you strike, strike home.

AGAMEMNON.

O for those Greeks!
That this rude day are tossing on the seas;
Those hardy Greeks, whom ten years war has steel'd;
With toils, with dangers, and with death familiar:
Then should you see what chaff before the wind
Are these weak sons of soft enfeebling peace,
These wretches, only bold where unresisted.

MELISANDER.

But since, my lord, you cannot now exert
This nobler force, let prudence take its place.
Have patience only, till you safely can,
And surely, seize him.

AGAMEMNON.

Well, till then I will.
And, tho' not made of patient mold, in this
I will have patience, will, some tedious hours,
Repress my vengeance——— [*Pausing.*
Yes, I like the thought—
He may be seiz'd this evening at the banquet,

Be there surpriz'd with ease—and shall!—
For, by th' eternal gods that rule mankind!
The sleep of death alone shall seal these eyes,
While such a wretch holds power in my dominions.
Oh Clytemnestra! to the public, now,
Succeeds the private pang.—At thought of thee,
New rage, new vengeance shake my inmost soul!
Was my belov'd, my queen, my Clytemnestra,
So long abandon'd in a villain's power,
Who knows, it seems, no limits, owns no laws,
Save those one vice imposes on another?
And now the secret cause, I fear, is plain,
Of that unusual damp, that strange dejection,
Which clouded her at meeting. Still the more
I pour'd my fondness, still the more distress'd
She seem'd; and, turning from my tender gaze,
The copious shower stole down her troubled cheek;
As if she pity'd those my blind endearments,
And in her breast some horrid secret swell'd—
Should it be so—Confusion!—Can I stoop
Even to suppose it!—How from slight mistakes
Great evils spring! But the most fruitful source
Of every evil—O that I, in thunder,
Could sound it o'er the listning earth to kings—
Is delegating power to wicked hands.

MELISANDER.

My lord, let no suspicions of the queen
E'er taint your bosom: if I judge aright——

AGAMEMNON.

No, Melisander, no; I am not jealous;
In me that passion and contempt were one;
No, 'tis her situation gives me horror,
Her dreadful situation!—But of this

Enough.—Then tell me, Arcas, tell me truly;
Are there a few, say, do there yet remain
A faithful few! to save the sinking state?
Can you, ere night, collect an honest band,
A band of such as worthy are to rescue
Their king and country from impending fate?
Ah! little thought I, that amidst my subjects,
Embosom'd sweet in peace, I, like a tyrant,
Should e'er have needed guards.

ARCAS.

Yes, Sir, I know
A band of generous youths, whom native virtue,
Unbroken yet by avarice or profusion,
Fits for our purpose: These I can collect——

AGAMEMNON.

About it quickly, Arcas; lose no time:
Go, bring me to the banquet those brave youths:
I long for their acquaintance. Till that hour,
Domestic cares and joys demand my presence:
The father's heart now bears me to my children.
Farewel! My all depends upon your conduct.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

AGAMEMNON, MELISANDER.

AGAMEMNON.

Domestic pleasures spread their charms in vain—
O for the hour of vengeance! I, till then,
But stalk about, the shadow of a king.
Heard you from Arcas aught?

MELISANDER.

Be patient, Sir.
As yet the time permits not his return.
Arcas is zealous, ardent in your service,
And will not fail his duty.

Enter an OFFICER *belonging to the court.*

OFFICER.

Sir, Cassandra
Is just arriv'd.

AGAMEMNON.

Conduct the princess hither.
This Priam's fairest daughter, Melisander,
Is a young princess of engaging beauty,
Rais'd by distress, of noble sense and spirit;
But, by poetic visions led astray,
She dream't Apollo lov'd her, and the gift
Of prophecy bestow'd, to gain her promise:
The gift once her's, the chastely-faithless maid
Deceiv'd the god; who therefore, in revenge,
Since he could not recal it, made it useless,
For ever doom'd to meet with disregard.

E'er-since the lovely visionary raves
With dignity; foretels the fate of nations;
And, judging of the future from the past,
Has oft been wondrous happy in her guesses.
Some strange, some recent instances of this,
Confirm her in her venerable madness.

MELISANDER.

Be not too rash in judging, Agamemnon;
For we, blind mortals, but a little know
Of boundless Nature—Hark! the princess comes;
I hear her voice, I hear the voice of sorrow.

SCENE II.

AGAMEMNON, MELISANDER, CASSANDRA, *attended by* Trojan *Captives.*

CASSANDRA *entering.*

O hostile roofs! O Ilium! O my country!

AGAMEMNON.

I cannot blame your grief, unhappy princess,
But, if it can relieve you, here be sure
Of an asylum, safe as Priam's palace.

CASSANDRA.

O sweet abode! O palace of my fathers!
My bleeding heart melts while I think of thee;
Think of the days of innocence and joy,
That shone upon me there. How chang'd art thou!
Ah! what a scene, when I beheld thee last!
Rage, blood, and flames, and shrieks of murder round me!
The sword of Pyrrhus, and a feeble father!
Where was your Hector then? Where all his sons?

O Priam's numerous race! what are you now
Become? Ah me, the desolating gods
Have laid their hands, their iron hands, upon us.

AGAMEMNON.

From past misfortunes, princess, turn your eye—

CASSANDRA.

'Tis true, the future may full well suffice.
Th' avenging sisters trace my footsteps still,
The hunters still pursue the trembling doe.
Where am I?—Gods!—Black heavy drops of blood
Run down the guilty walls—With the dun shades
Of night ascending, lo! successive troops
Of Trojan ghosts are flocking to the banquet:
Permitted by th' infernal gods, they come,
To feast them with the horrors of this night,
To snuff the blood of victims—Ha! the car,
The gay triumphal car, is turn'd, at once,
Into a mournful bier, that nods along,
Solemn and slow—Yes, Troy shall be aveng'd:
I shall the vengeance see; and yet not see
Thy light, returning Phœbus.

AGAMEMNON.

Fair Cassandra,
Indulge no more these melancholy views,
These visions form'd by gloomy-minded grief.
We will each art, each tender art employ,
To sooth your sorrows, to restore your peace.
You come not to the proud unfeeling race
Of yesterday: we know the turns of fortune;
Have drunk the cup, the wholesome cup of sufferings,
That not inflames but moderates the mind.
Then fear not, princess; let me call you daughter!

Your treatment shall be such as well becomes
The dignity of woe, becomes the great,
The fair unhappy. Nought shall touch your honour.
I know, I feel your beauty: but here dwell
The gods of hospitality and faith;
The hymeneal powers are honour'd here.
Yes, I will shield thee, equal with Electra,
With my lov'd daughter in thy friendship blest.

CASSANDRA.

In spite of swelling tears that choak the way,
Of bitter tears by big remembrance shed,
I own thy goodness, thank thee, Agamemnon.
Mean time, in vain are all thy generous cares,
On my account. The gods of death will, soon,
Extend o'er me their all-protecting wing.
I shall not long, I shall not want protection;
But who, devoted prince, will give it thee?
Even while we talk the secret wheels are turning,
That lift the vile, and lay the mighty low.
I pity thee, the house of Pelops pity:
Forgive me, Troy: I pity thy destroyers.

Enter an OFFICER.

OFFICER.

A messenger from Arcas, Sir——

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis well.
To my apartment lead him—you mean-while
[*To* Melisander.
Attend the princess; grace her with such honours,
As suits her to receive, and me to give.

SCENE III.

CASSANDRA, CHORUS *of* Trojan *Captives*, MELISANDER.

MELISANDER.

Fair princess, stop these tears. Exert that best,
That noblest virtue, which can master fortune,
An equal mind.

CASSANDRA.

Not for myself I weep!——
But, oh my dear companions! How for you
My bosom yearns!

CHORUS.

We have together liv'd!
Together let us die!

CASSANDRA.

Together liv'd!
At this ten thousand images awake;
Ten thousand little tendernesses throb.

CHORUS.

O days of youth! O careless days! Untaught
To weep, if love shed not the pleasing tear.

CASSANDRA.

O woods! O fountains! O delightful meads!
That lent us flowers, the prime of blooming May,
To deck our tresses.

CHORUS.

O the yellow banks
Of fair Scamander! in whose silver stream
We us'd to bathe, beneath the secret shade.

CASSANDRA.

O chearful Ida's airy summits! where
The gods delight to dwell.

CHORUS.

O silent Troy!
Whose streets have often echo'd with our song.

CASSANDRA.

O the lost labours of a ruin'd people!
O country! freedom! friends! relations! All,
That gives or taste or dignity to life,
All, all is gone, beyond recovery gone!

CHORUS.

Then let us die!

CASSANDRA.

For me, the hunted hart
More fervent pants not for the cooling stream,
Than I to wrap me in the quiet shades
Of death. But ah! my helpless friends, for you
I feel its keenest anguish.

CHORUS.

Not for us,
Feel not for us. What comfort have we left?
What hope, what wish in life?—One healing pang,
And then we weep no more.

CASSANDRA.

Refreshing thought!
And then from bondage, pain, from every ill,
For ever free, we meet our friends again;
Our parents, brothers, sisters, lovers meet.

CHORUS.

Then let us die! and sudden be the blow!

CASSANDRA.

The gods assent.—Behold the happy shore!
But, ah! there lies a stormy sea betwixt!

MELISANDER.

So sings the plaining nightingale her woes.

CASSANDRA.

Ah, far unlike the nightingale!—She sings,
Unceasing, thro' the balmy nights of May;
She sings from love and joy, while we, alas!—

MELISANDER.

Behold the queen.—Deep-wrapt in thought she seems—

CASSANDRA.

O direful musings!—Lead us from her presence.

SCENE IV.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Sweet peace of mind! whence pleasure borrows taste,
Daughter of virtue! whither art thou fled?
To what calm cottage, to what blameless shade,
Far from these guilty walls? O walls! O race!
To horrors doom'd!—Before me gathers fast
A deepning gloom, with unknown terrors big.—
Not quite unknown.—Gods! what a dreadful hint
Flash'd from Egisthus, when I saw him last!
And to what desperate actions cannot safety,
Ambition, love, and vengeance drive the soul!—
Distraction lies that way—yet, how escape?
Shame urges on behind, unpitying shame,
That worst of furies, whose fell aspect frights

MELISANDER.

Madam, I have.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Here in this palace?—Ha! why stand you silent?
You keep your eyes unmov'd upon the ground.
What should this mean? Beneath that rough disguise
There lurks, methinks, a form which somewhere I
Have seen.

MELISANDER.

The dream of fancy, that, the more
It is indulg'd, perplexes still the more.
I tarry here too long; the king's commands
Admit of no delay.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis so! 'tis so!
Air, features, manners, voice, this study'd haste,
The shifts of one unpractis'd in deceit,
All, all conspire—One image wakes another,
And thick they flash upon me!

MELISANDER.

You grow pale,
You tremble, Madam; that mistake, I find,
Concerning me turns wilder and disturbs you.
Let me retire——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A moment—stay——

MELISANDER.

In vain,
I find it is in vain to wrap me longer
In these evasions.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Melisander!

MELISANDER.

Madam——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And can it be? Behold I then the man,
Whom I so long have number'd with the dead?
Almighty gods! Behold I Melisander?
But, ha! how chang'd! how darken'd with suspicion!
Yes, I am deem'd the author of his woes.

MELISANDER.

Madam, forgive——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Why else from me conceal
Your wish'd return—I plainly am distrusted—
By Agamemnon too—It was unkind,
Unjust, unfriendly, shocks me, Melisander.

MELISANDER.

Indeed you wrong me, Madam, wrong me much,
To judge me apt or to conceive or spread
Distrust. I would have perish'd by myself,
Unknown, unwept, in helpless solitude,
Rather than here return to this full world,
To set my mistress and her lord at variance.
O think me not a busy peace-destroyer!
Accursed is the wretch, to social life
The most inhuman foe, who in the nice,
The tender scenes of life, dares rashly meddle,
And sow division between friends and lovers.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The generous heart is ever slow to blame,
But, Melisander, not to me were owing,

Not in the least to me, those cruel woes,
This worse than death, which you so long have suffer'd.
Instead of that, your fate, how, whither gone,
If carry'd off, or secretly destroy'd,
Was all a mournful mystery to me,
Dark as the night on which you disappear'd.
Did you but know, here in my secret soul,
What undissembled pangs your absence rouz'd,
What I have felt for you, and for myself;
In losing such a wise and faithful friend;
Knew you but these, O knew you, Melisander,
How your disaster has been truly mine,
You never could suspect me.

MELISANDER.

Witness Heav'n!
I never did—Your heart I know disdains
A thought that looks like cruelty or fraud.
From the first moment that his ruffians seiz'd me,
I had no doubt, I knew it was Egisthus.
Some time before I mark'd the rising storm,
And meant to warn you, but it sudden burst,
And bore me far away, far from all means,
Even from all hope of lending you assistance.
Ay! there I suffer'd most. My fears for you,
At once by guile and violence beset,
Took off the point of my own proper woes.
But when your awful virtues struck my thought,
Your wisdom, spirit, resolution, truth;
That dread effulgence of the spotless soul,
Which smites the hardest villain into shame;
My fears appear'd impertinent and vain.
Yet doubtless, Madam, you have had occasion
For a firm ruling hand and watchful eye,

For every virtue; and I truly joy,
That Agamemnon finds at his return
Egisthus by your conduct thus restrain'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By Heavens! he tries me.—O suspicious guilt.
[*Aside.*
Your words are friendly, but your deeds are doubtful.
No, Melisander, friendship with distrust
Can never dwell. And that I am distrusted
To me is certain—In a matter too,
That much concern'd my peace, concern'd my honour.
For did you even ascribe your woes to me,
You could not manage with more distant caution.

MELISANDER.

Whence is it that the noble Clytemnestra,
Who us'd to shine in a superior sphere
Of fair serenity and candid peace,
Should to these doubts descend, these dark suspicions?
For me, I here attest the gods, my soul
Ne'er knew a thought, that swell'd not with esteem,
With love and veneration of your virtues.
And for the king, no young enraptur'd lover,
In all the first effusions of his soul,
New to the mighty charm: no friend, who meets,
After long years of dark and silent absence,
His happy friend again, feels livelier joy,
Than Agamemnon feels, while his glad tongue
Runs out in endless praise of Clytemnestra—
But I must wait his orders.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Do your duty.
I too must go, must to Egisthus strait [*Aside.*
Impart this dreadful news.

SCENE. VI.

MELISANDER *alone.*

She went abruptly—
And as we talk'd, methought, strange passions shook
Her inward frame, and darken'd every feature.
Behold the black, the guilt-concealing night,
Fast closes round. Wide, thro' this ample palace,
The lamps begin to shine. The tempest falls;
The weary winds sink, breathless. But, who knows,
What fiercer tempest yet may shake this night.
Soul-chearing Phœbus, with thy sacred beams
O quickly come, and chase these sullen shadows.

ACT V. SCENE I.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS.

EGISTHUS.

Ah Clytemnestra! what a change is here!
And must I then thus steal an interview?
Are we alone?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

You fright me with that question:
You look astoniſhed.

EGISTHUS.

On the brink of ruin
We, tottering, stand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

That is no news to me.

EGISTHUS.

But——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What?

EGISTHUS.

We are discover'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ha! discover'd!

EGISTHUS.

Yes, certainly discover'd. Arcas now,
By Agamemnon's orders, in the city

Collects a band to seize me at the banquet,
A ſhort hour hence. And my accusers, Madam,
You may be well assur'd are not your friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis plain! 'tis plain!—The parting fogs disperse:
And now the doubtful scene stands all reveal'd—
Who could have thought they should dissemble thus?
But I can tell you more.

EGISTHUS.

What, Madam? speak;
For danger presses on us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Saw you him,
This seeming stranger, sav'd by Agamemnon?

EGISTHUS.

Arcas and he to-day, my friends inform me,
Were busy with the king; and, doubtless, then,
It was concerted that I should be seiz'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah! did you know, Egisthus, who he is!——

EGISTHUS.

Who?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Melisander.

EGISTHUS.

Gods! and does he live?
For my confusion sav'd! O gross, gross folly!
To do an action of that kind by halves.
Had he been silent dust—To please you, Madam,
From a false tenderness for you, he lives——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A mighty merit! glorious boast indeed!
Hear him, ye gracious gentle powers of love!
From tenderness for me, he did not murder
A worthy blameless man, who never hurt him;
He murder'd not my friend, my faithful friend.
Ah! 'tis such tenderness, that makes me wretched;
Such tenderness, that still in blacker guilt,
In the last depth of misery will plunge me.

EGISTHUS.

It is not, Madam, now a time for this.
Think of our situation: close beset
By all those ills which mortals moſt abhor,
Whom have we to confide in but each other?
And this sad meeting is perhaps our last.
Concord alone, and vigorous measures, can
Prevent our ruin—But from Melisander,
What did you learn? Are you yourself suspected?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I cannot find I am:—And yet I must.

EGISTHUS.

But as for me, my ruin is no secret.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis true, some dark attempt goes on against you.

EGISTHUS.

Then have I rightly done.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What have you done?

EGISTHUS.

What prudence, justice, love, and vengeance, all
Demand——

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Immortal Powers! you have not?—

EGISTHUS.

No:
But must, and will—What else can you propose?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, any thing besides! immediate flight,
Eternal absence, death!——

EGISTHUS.

Let others die!
Let the proud, faithless, false, injurious tyrant;
The hero glorious in his daughter's murder;
The scourge of Greece, who has, from wild ambition,
Shed so much blood—let Agamemnon die!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh heavens and earth! you shock me to distraction!
I have, Egisthus, hitherto avoided
This dreadful point, still hoping you might drop
Your horrid resolution: now I tell you,
Before the listening gods, I plainly tell you,
That Agamemnon shall not fall unwarn'd:
You shall not rise by me into his throne:
I will not be the tool of your ambition;
Will not be wretched, infamous for ever,
The blush of women, the disgrace of nature!
That you may gain your execrable views,
Mask'd under smooth pretences.—I am guilty;

Alas, I am—But think not, therefore, tyrant!
To give me law. There are degrees in guilt;
And I have still my reason left, have left
Some resolution, some remains of virtue:
Yes, I dare die; and who dares die, Egisthus,
Needs not be driven to villainous extremes!
Mark me, insulting man!—My certain cure
Of every woe, my cordial draught is ready;
And if you do not promise me, here swear
To drop your fell designs on Agamemnon,
To quit this palace—You may still escape—
And never see me more; I go, I go,
This moment to discover all and die!

EGISTHUS.

What! Clytemnestra!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nothing shall dissuade me.
I will not argue more—Say, only say,
Must I betake me to this cruel refuge?
This dire necessity?

EGISTHUS.

Permit me, Madam;
Hear me but once, and then pursue your purpose.
Suppose us guilty, what you will;—yet, Madam,
Shall we acknowledge and proclaim that guilt?
Shall we, by patient waiting for our doom,
By pitiful neglect of self-defence,
Unheard-of meanness! stamp it into shame?
No; let us wipe it out with bold success.
It is success that colours all in life:
Success makes fools admir'd, makes villains honest;
All the proud virtue of this vaunting world
Fawns on success and power, howe'er acquir'd.

If then, supposing guilt, it were a meanness
To stoop to shame, can words express the madness
Of stopping short, with infamy and ruin,
When justice, love and vengeance urge to glory?
Instead of being deem'd a generous queen,
The brave avenger of her sex's honour,
Fam'd for her spirit, for her just resentment;
Who greatly punish'd a perfidious husband,
A cruel tyrant; one, who from his bed,
His throne, propos'd, with open shame to turn her,
And to her place to take his country's foe,
To take a Trojan captive, proud Cassandra:
Instead of such renown, can Clytemnestra—
Forgive the doubt—Can she submit to pass,
Thro' future times, for an abandon'd woman?
A feeble, spiritless, abandon'd woman!—
Nay, Madam, hear the truth, what now I tell you
Must, in a little scanty hour, take place;
In a few moments, you must be the first
Or last of women; be the public scorn,
Or admiration of approving Greece—
You know you must—be Agamemnon's slave,
Cassandra's slave, or nobly punish both,
And reign with me in happiness and glory.
Consult your heart; can you resolve on shame?
On voluntary shame? That only ill
The generous fear, which kills the soul itself.
Were those fair features, full of lovely grandeur,
Form'd for confusion? That majestic front,
To be bow'd down with infamy and vileness?
Ah! can you bear contempt? The venom'd tongue
Of those whom ruin pleases? The keen sneer,
The lewd reproaches of the rascal herd;
Who, for the self-same actions, if successful,

Would be as grossly lavish in your praise?—
To sum up all in one—Can you support
The scornful glances, the malignant joy,
Or more detested pity of a rival?
Of a triumphant rival?—No; you cannot.
That conscious worth, which kindles in your eye,
Tells me you cannot.—
But in vain disputes
No more to squander these important moments:
Know, that I have not, to the frail decision
Of wav'ring fear and female weakness, left
Our freedom, safety, happiness and honour.
Even in your own despite you shall be sav'd.
And could you be so lost to reason, wild,
To do what woman never did before,
What shocks humanity, accuse yourself;
You only court dishonour to no purpose:
For Agamemnon now cannot escape;
I am already master of this palace;
All is prepar'd, my people all are fix'd,
All properly dispos'd; and here I swear,
By sacred justice, glory, love, and vengeance!
He dies!—dies in the bath, before the banquet!—
And with him dies Caſſandra, ſhe, who dares,
In her presumptuous thought, usurp thy honours.
She weeps!—O my ador'd! my Clytemnestra!
Forgive this barbarous necessary truth!
Did I not love thee, love thee more than empire,
Than life and glory, would I thus disclose
These dangerous secrets? Could I not have veil'd,
And with more certain caution, gain'd my purpose?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh, that you had, Egisthus! then, alas!
I ſhould have fondly thought myself less guilty.

EGISTHUS.

I lose myself in softness, while the time,
With danger big, demands intrepid deeds.
Wipe off these tears—When next we meet again,
All will be well.

SCENE II.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah! when we meet again!—
I stand at last convinc'd, and must dissemble—
Yet how dissemble? Painted in my face,
Are the full horrors of this bloody deed.——
But who are these approaching?—Ha!—Cassandra!
How fair she seems! how lovely! hateful charms!
That well may rival mine, decay'd and sunk
By guilt and sorrow—She possess my bed!
Possess my sceptre!—This restores my spirit;——
I am abus'd! too patient!—Perish all!
Perish myself, Egisthus, Agamemnon!
So this proud rival, this Cassandra perish!

SCENE III.

CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives*, MELISANDER,

MELISANDER.

Daughters of Ilium! By the king's command,
I come to ask your presence at the banquet.
Till then allow me to partake your woes:
I have a reverence for them. I myself,
Thanks to the gracious gods! have known misfortune;

I am with grief acquainted; therefore can
For others feel. Sweet source of every virtue,
O sacred Sorrow! He who knows not thee,
Knows not the best emotions of the heart,
Those tender tears that humanize the soul,
The sigh that charms, the pang that gives delight;
He dwells too near to cruelty and pride,
And is a novice in the school of virtue.

CASSANDRA.

We thank thee, ſtranger, for thy generous pity.
Heaven has, it seems, throughout diffus'd the good.
May the kind gods, the hospitable powers,
For this befriend thee! Thou must wander still,
Wilt their protection want.—But Agamemnon!
Where is the king?

MELISANDER.

He bathes him for the banquet,
The banquet earn'd by ten years war and toil.

CASSANDRA.

Short ſighted man! to dream of feſtal joy,
When his next banquet is perhaps with Pluto.
He comes! the god comes ruſhing on my soul!
O gently sooth me with the voice of music!
Assuage my pangs with harmony!—Methinks,
I hear Apollo's lyre.

MELISANDER.

Mysterious Powers!

CASSANDRA.

'Tis gone—And now harſh discord takes its place:
Dire yellings now affright my trembling ear!
What means this uproar of the howling forest?

The lioness and wolf, together leagu'd,
Pursue the lion's life.—Behold! the snare,
Th' infernal snare is set, spread by the stream,
Where, unsuspecting harm, he bathes at noon.
Soon will these guiltless waters blush with blood.

MELISANDER.

There is a sort of gloomy light in this,
That flashes horror on me.

CASSANDRA.

A black swarm
Of fell ideas seize my fancy.—Hence!
O snatch me from this palace! shambles rather!
It smells of carnage; breathes a hideous steam,
As if from gaping sepulchres exhal'd.
And lo! the spotless loves, the sports, the joys,
The weeping Lares fly: while in their place,
The vices all, the raging furies come;
And with them Comus, the flush'd god of banquets,
Besmear'd with gore—They sing the funeral hymn—
What do I see? what mean these mangled forms?
These pale, these nightly phantoms; such as rise,
To working fancy's eye, in troubled dreams?—
See! where they sit for ever at the gates,
Demanding vengeance—Vengeance is at hand—
Ha! 'tis the murder'd boys, whose limbs were here,
Serv'd up to their own sire, to be devour'd!——

MELISANDER.

She wakes my dread—The story of Thyestes!

CASSANDRA.

With this devoted race involv'd I fall:
Nor falls the slave alone—The master falls.

But man shall die for man, for woman woman:
Remember this.

MELISANDER.

The slave, the master fall!

CASSANDRA.

Ah bosom-traitress! Ill-persuaded queen!
And canst thou then the barbarous secret keep?—

MELISANDER.

What queen? what secret? Speak more plain, Cassandra!

CASSANDRA.

From guilt, in vain, to greater guilt you fly,
From crime to crime precipitated—No!
The wicked find no peace—Distraction waits thee!—
One effort more—Yes, save thy lord, and die—
That throw belong'd to virtue—Cannot then
The gentle Powers prevail?—A moment yet,
The doubtful balance yet allows a moment—
Down, down it goes, for vengeance and for Troy!
But, ah! such vengeance, as even foes themselves
Abhor to see!

MELISANDER.

She staggers all my reason.
Unveil these dreadful oracles—Perhaps—

CASSANDRA.

Yes, in a moment, they will be too plain.
The moment comes! The furies lash it on!
Ha! Now!

MELISANDER.

Unusual horror creeps——

CASSANDRA.

Alas!
Keep from the murderous sacrificer's hand,

O keep the victim bull! Lo! seiz'd, he spurns,
He foams in vain—Behold the lifted blow!
Behold the thirsty steel!—They strike him!—Hark!
What dismal echoes run from room to room!

MELISANDER.

I heard a distant noise!——

[*The noise of* Agamemnon's *assassination heard indistinctly, and at a distance, behind the scenes.*

CASSANDRA.

Again!—They strive,
Th' assassins labour who shall wound him most.
'Tis done!—He falls!—

AGAMEMNON, *behind the Scenes.*

[*The noise heard distinctly, and near.*

Off! villains! cowards! off!—
By villains murder'd!—Oh!

MELISANDER.

Great gods! the king!

SCENE IV.

MELISANDER, CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives*, ELECTRA, ORESTES.

ELECTRA.

Stop, generous stranger! Agamemnon's friend!

MELISANDER.

What would Electra? what with Melisander?

ELECTRA.

Heavens! Melisander!

MELISANDER.

To the king's assistance
I fly; detain me not.

ELECTRA.

He is no more!——

MELISANDER.

Ha! dead!

ELECTRA.

Yes, murder'd by Egisthus! dead!
Pierc'd with a thousand wounds! O horror! horror!—
We have not time for grief—Orestes—Quick!
Fly! save my brother!

ORESTES.

Leave my father!—No!
It is but once that I have ever seen him,
Shall I no more?

ELECTRA.

But to revenge his death,
O fly, Orestes, for that glorious purpose!
Tremendous gods! Methinks, I see his ghost,
That beckons you away!

ORESTES.

I come! I come!
On Melisander——

ELECTRA.

Brother!

ORESTES.

Oh, my sister!
What will become of thee?

ELECTRA.

Good Melisander,
O guard my brother! save our only hope!—
I heard a noise——Farewel!

ORESTES, *going.*

Ah! poor Electra!

SCENE V.

ELECTRA, CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives.*

ELECTRA.

The murderers come! stain'd with my father's blood!
Hide me, Cassandra, hide me from a sight
I cannot bear, a scene to nature shocking!

SCENE VI.

The back-scene opening discovers, at a distance, AGAMEMNON's *body.* ELECTRA *throws herself by it.*

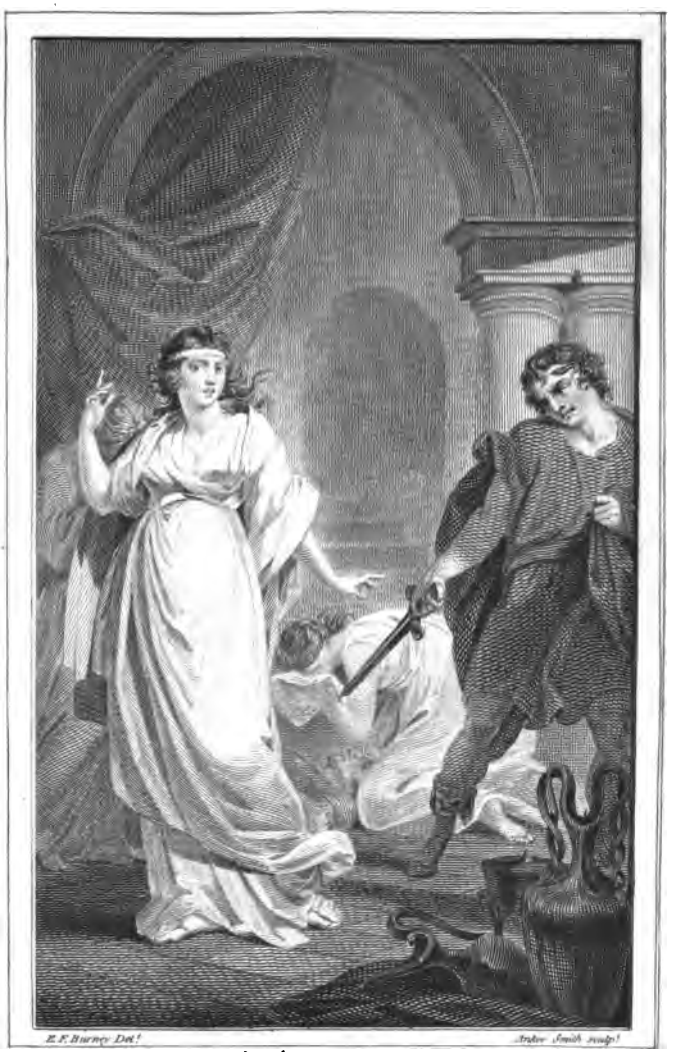
CASSANDRA, Trojan *captives,* EGISTHUS *with some of his party.*

EGISTHUS.

Enough, my friends!—How low, how silent, now,
The mighty boaster lies!—Another blow
Crowns my revenge.——

CASSANDRA.

It shall not, base assassin!
The gods are just; amidst the crimes of men,
Are firmly just, supremely wise and good:



AGAMEMNON. Act V. Scene 6.

Cassandra. ——— *The gods are here, in all their terrors present!*

Published according to Act of Parliament, June 1st 1786, by T. Cadell in the Strand.

The gods are here, in all their terrors present!
See where in dreadful majesty they sit!
And write thy doom in Agamemnon's blood!

EGISTHUS.

Think not to shake me with these gloomy fables:
This arm that has acquir'd, shall guard my power;
And since I now enjoy my long-wish'd vengeance,
All here is calm and chearful.

CASSANDRA.

The false boast
Of agonizing guilt! Thy soul, I see,
Beneath this harden'd pride, this brutal courage,
Boils with black torments, and with inward tempest.
I know whence breaks that gleam of joy athwart thee,
As lightning flashes o'er a troubled sky:
Thou dream'st the prince now falls beneath thy fury:
But hear and tremble—young Orestes lives!

EGISTHUS.

Hence with thy vain predictions, doating woman!—

SCENE VII.

EGISTHUS, CASSANDRA, *&c. and to them* ASSASSINS *sent to murder* ORESTES.

EGISTHUS.

Well, is Orestes dead?

ASSASSIN.

Ah, Sir! escap'd—
When all was in confusion, here, and tumult.

EGISTHUS.

O nothing then is done! Fly! tardy villains!
Pursue him to the farthest verge of earth,——
No dark retreat, no country.—But here comes
Another storm. Distraction wings her pace.

SCENE VIII.

CLYTEMNESTRA, EGISTHUS, CASSANDRA, &c.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Off! give me way! to desarts let me fly!
The wildest savage there!——
Why pierce me thus with looks?—In every eye
There is a dagger; chief in thine [*to* Egisthus]—Ha! villain!
I know thee; know these eyes, where smiling love
To the red glarings of a fury's torch
Is now transform'd.——Yes, traitor! turn away:
But, ere you go, give me my peace again;
Give me my happy family around;
Give me my virtue, honour, nay, my glory;
Or give me death, tho' death cannot relieve me.—
Are these the deeds of love?—I cannot step,
Unless I dip my shivering feet in blood.
Compar'd with this polluted, this dire palace,
The sepulchre is gay.—But whither fly?——
Ah! what avails it where the guilty fly,
Since from themselves they cannot!—Ha! behold!
The black abyss discloses to my view;
And down I go, a dark, a deep descent!——
Hell from beneath is mov'd at my approach:

Its princes flock around. Behold, they say,
The greatly-wretched, greatly-wicked woman!
She who preferr'd the villain to the hero!
The Trojan shades, with sharp derision, thank me:
The Grecian droop—Lo! where he comes himself!
See! how in sullen majesty he stalks!—
Oh, look not on me with that silent scorn!
I am too curs'd already!——

[*Faints into the arms of her attendants.*

EGISTHUS.

Bear her hence:
And look she be attended well.——But hark!
What new alarm?

SCENE IX.

EGISTHUS, CASSANDRA, *&c. to them a* MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

As Melisander, Sir,
Bore off Orestes, to th' assembled senate
He show'd the prince, and rouz'd them to revenge.
'Tis nought but rage. The people, in a torrent,
By Arcas headed, pour upon the palace.
Besides, each moment, Agamemnon's troops—

EGISTHUS.

Quick! summon here my friends—In Io's grove
They ready wait. We this important day
Will or with conquest crown, or bravely die.

CASSANDRA.

No, tyrant, no! the gods refuse thee that:
Not like the brave, but like the trembling coward,

Th' assassinating coward, thou shalt die;
There! in that spot, where Agamemnon lies!

EGISTHUS.

Lead these ill-boding women to their fate;
And guard Electra.

CASSANDRA.

The most grateful gift
A tyrant can bestow is instant death.
We shall be happy soon. But all the gods,
Combining all their mercy, from remorse,
From scorn and misery, cannot save the villain.

EPILOGUE

SPOKEN BY MRS. CIBBER.

OUR bard, to modern epilogue a foe,
Thinks such mean mirth but deadens generous woe;
Dispels in idle air the moral sigh,
And wipes the tender tear from Pity's eye:
No more with social warmth the bosom burns;
But all th' unfeeling selfish man returns.
*

Thus he began:—And you approv'd the strain;
Till the next couplet sunk to light and vain.
You check'd him there.—To you, to reason just,
He owns he triumph'd in your kind disgust.
Charm'd by your frown, by your displeasure grac'd,
He hails the rising virtue of your taste.
Wide will its influence spread as soon as known:
Truth, to be lov'd, needs only to be shown.
Confirm it, once, the fashion to be good:
(Since fashion leads the fool, and awes the rude)
No petulance shall wound the public ear;
No hand applaud what honour shuns to hear:
No painful blush the modest cheek shall stain;
The worthy breast shall heave with no disdain.
Chastis'd to decency, the *British* stage
Shall oft invite the fair, invite the sage:
Both shall attend well-pleas'd, well-pleas'd depart;
Or if they doom the verse, absolve the heart.

* Another epilogue was spoken after the first representation of the play, which began with the first six lines of this: but the rest of that epilogue having been very justly disliked by the audience, this was substituted in its place.

ALFRED:

A

MASQUE.

REPRESENTED BEFORE

THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES,

AT CLIFFDEN, ON THE FIRST OF AUGUST, 1740.

By Mr. THOMSON and Mr. MALLET.

Si velimus cum *priorum temporum* necessitate certare, vincemur. Ingeniosior est enim ad *excogitandum* simulatio, veritate; servitus, libertate; metus, amore.

PLIN. Pan. Trajan.

THE ARGUMENT.

After the Danes had made themselves masters of Chippenham, the strongest city in the kingdom of Wessex; Alfred was at once abandoned by all his subjects. In this universal defection, that monarch found himself obliged to retire into the little island of Athelney in Somersetshire; a place then rough with woods and of difficult access. There, in the habit of a peasant, he lived unknown, for some time, in a shepherd's cottage. He is supposed to be found in this retreat by the Earl of Devon; whose castle, upon the river Tau, was then besieged by the Danes.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

ALFRED, . . .	MR. MILWARD.
ELTRUDA, . . .	MRS. HORTON.
HERMIT, . . .	MR. QUIN.
EARL OF DEVON, . . .	MR. MILLS.
CORIN, a shepherd, . .	MR. SALWAY.
EMMA, his wife, ...	MRS. CLIVE.

A Bard, Soldiers, Spirits.

The SCENE represents a plain, surrounded with woods. On one side, a cottage: on the other, flocks and herds in distant prospect. A hermit's cave in full view, overhung with trees, wild and grotesque.

ALFRED:

A

MASQUE.

ACT I. SCENE I.

CORIN, EMMA.

EMMA.

SHEPHERD, 'tis he. Beneath yon aged oak,
All on the flowery turf he lays him down.

CORIN.

Soft: let us not disturb him. Gentle Emma,
Poor tho' he be, unfriended and unknown,
My pity waits with reverence on his fortune,
Modest of carriage, and of speech most gracious,
As if some saint or angel, in disguise,
Had grac'd our lowly cottage with his presence.
He steals, I know not how, into the heart,
And makes it pant to serve him. Trust me, Emma,
He is no common man.

EMMA.

Some lord, perhaps,
Or valiant chief, that from our deadly foe,

The haughty, cruel, unbelieving Dane,
Seeks shelter here.

CORIN.

And shelter he shall find.
Who loves his country, is my friend and brother.
Behold him well. Fair virtue in his aspect,
Even thro' the homely russet that conceals him,
Shines forth and proves him noble. Seest thou, Emma,
Yon western clouds? The sun they strive to hide,
Yet darts his beam around.

EMMA.

Your thought is mine;
He is not what his present fortunes speak him,
But, ah! the raging foe is all around us:
We dare not keep him here.

CORIN.

Content thee, wife:
This island is of strength. Nature's own hand
Hath planted round a deep defence of woods,
The sounding ash, the mighty oak; each tree
A sheltering grove: and choak'd up all between
With wild encumbrance of perplexing thorns,
And horrid brakes. Beyond this woody verge,
Two rivers broad and rapid hem us in.
Along their channel spreads the gulphy pool,
And trembling quagmire, whose deceitful green
Betrays the foot it tempts. One path alone
Winds to this plain, so roughly difficult,
This single arm, poor shepherd as I am,
Could well dispute it with twice twenty Danes.

EMMA.

Yet think, my Corin, on the stern decree
Of that proud foe, "Who harbours or relieves

" An English captain, dies the death of traitors:
" But who their haunts discovers, shall be safe,
" And high rewarded."

CORIN.

Now, just Heaven forbid,
A British man should ever count for gain
What villainy must earn. No: are we poor?
Be honesty our riches. Are we mean,
And humbly born? The true heart makes us noble.
These hands can toil, can sow the ground, and reap
For thee and thy sweet babes. Our daily labour
Is daily wealth: it finds us bread and raiment.
Could Danish gold give more? And for the death
These tyrants threaten, let me rather meet it,
Than e'er betray my guest.——

EMMA.

Alas the while,
That loyal faith is fled from hall and bower,
To dwell with village-swains!

CORIN.

Ah, look! behold!
Where, like some goodly tree by wintry winds
Torn from the roots and withering, our sad guest
Lies on the ground diffus'd.

EMMA.

I weep to see it.

CORIN.

Thou hast a heart sweet pity loves to dwell in.
Dry up thy tears; and lean on this just hope:
If yet to do away his country's shame,
To serve her bravely on some blest occasion,
If for these ends this stranger sought our cottage,

DEVON.

From yonder heath-crown'd hill,
This island's eastern point, where in one stream
The Thone and Parret roll their blending waves,
I look'd, and saw the progress of the foe,
As of some tempest, some devouring fire,
That ruins without mercy where it spreads.
The riches of the year, the golden grain
That liberal crown'd our plains, lies trampled wide
By hostile feet, or rooted up; and waste
Deforms the broad highway. From space to space,
Far as my straining eye could shoot its beam,
Trees, cottages, and castles smoke to heaven
In one ascending cloud. But oh for pity!
That way, my lord, where yonder verdant height
Declining slides into a fruitful vale,
Unsightly now and bare; a few poor hinds,
Grey-hair'd, and thinly clad, stood and beheld
The common ravage: motionless and mute
With hands to heaven up-rais'd, they stood, and wept—
My tears attended theirs——

ALFRED.

If this sad sight
Could pain thee to such anguish, what must I
Their king and parent feel?—It is a torment
Beyond the strength of patience to endure.
Why end I not at once this wretched being?
The means are in my hand.—But shall a prince
Thus poorly shroud him in the grave from pain,
And sense of shame? The madman, nay, the coward,
Has often dar'd the same. A monarch holds
His life in trust for others. I will live then:
Let Heaven dispose the rest.

DEVON.

Thrice-noble Alfred,
And England's only hope, whose virtues raise
Our frail mortality, our human dust,
Up to angelic splendor and perfection;
With you to bear the worst of ills, the spoil
Of wasteful war, the loss of life or freedom,
Is happiness, is glory.

ALFRED.

Ah, look round thee:
That mud-built cottage is thy sovereign's palace.
Yon hind, whose daily toil is all his wealth,
Lodges and feeds him. Are these times for flattery,
Or call it praise? such gaudy attributes
Would misbecome our best and proudest fortunes.
But what are mine? what is this high-prais'd Alfred?
Among ten thousand wretches, most undone.
That prince who sees his country laid in ruins,
His subjects perishing beneath the sword
Of foreign rage, who sees and cannot save them,
Is but supreme in misery!

DEVON.

My liege!
Who has not known ill fortune, never knew
Himself, or his own virtue. Be of comfort:
We can but die at last. Till that hour comes,
Let noble anger keep our hopes alive.
A sudden thought, as if from heaven inspir'd,
Darts on my soul. One castle still is ours,
Tho' close begirt and shaken by the Danes.
In this disguise, my chance of passing on,
Of entering there unknown, is promising,
And wears a lucky face. 'Tis our last stake,

And I will play it like a man whose life,
Whose honour hangs upon a single cast.
Meanwhile, my lord——

ALFRED.

Ha! Devon, thou hast rouz'd
My slumbering virtue. I applaud thy thought.
The praise of this brave daring shall be thine:
The danger shall be common. We will both
Strait tempt the Danish camp, and gain this fort;
To animate our brothers of the war,
Those Englishmen who yet deserve that name.
And hear eternal justice! if my life
Can make atonement for them, King of kings!
Accept thy willing victim. On my head
Be all their woes: to them be grace and mercy.
Come on my noble friend.

DEVON.

Ah, good my liege,
What fits a private valour and might grace
The simple soldier's courage, would proclaim
His general's rashness. You are England's king:
Your infant children, and your much lov'd queen;
Nay more, the public weal, ten thousand souls,
Whose hope you are, whose all depends on you,
Forbid this enterprize. 'Tis nobler virtue
To check this ardour, to reserve your sword
For some great day of known and high import;
That to your country, to the judging world
Shall justify all hazards you may run.
This trial suits but me.

ALFRED.

Well, go, my friend;
If thou shalt prosper, thou wilt call me hence

To head my people from their fears recover'd.
May that good angel, who inspir'd thy thought,
Throw round thy steps a veil of cloudy air,
That thou may'st walk invisible and safe.
He's gone—and now without a friend to aid me,
I stand alone, abandon'd to the gloom
Of my sad thoughts—Said I without a friend?
Oh blasphemous distrust! Have I not Thee,
All-powerful friend, and guardian of the righteous,
Have I not Thee to aid me? Let that thought
Support my drooping soul.—But, list. Ha! whence
These air-born notes that sound in measur'd sweetness
Thro' this vast silence?

SCENE III.

Solemn music is heard at a distance. It comes nearer in a full symphony: after which a single trumpet sounds a high and awakening air. Then the following stanzas are sung by two aërial spirits unseen.

First SPIRIT.

Hear, Alfred, father of the state,
Thy genius Heaven's high will declare!
What proves the hero truly great,
Is never, never to despair:
Is never to despair.

Second SPIRIT.

Thy hope awake, thy heart expand
With all its vigour, all its fires.
Arise! and save a sinking land!
Thy country calls, and Heaven inspires.

Both SPIRITS.

Earth calls, and Heaven inspires.

SCENE IV.

ALFRED *alone.*

All hail, ye gentle ministers of heaven!
Your song inspires new patience thro' my breast,
And generous hope: it wings my mounting soul
Above th' entangling mass of earthly passions,
That keep frail man, tho' struggling to be free,
Still fluttering in the dust.

SCENE V.

ALFRED, *the* HERMIT *advancing from his cave.*

ALFRED.

Thrice happy Hermit!
Whom thus the heavenly habitants attend,
Blessing thy calm retreat; while ruthless war
Fills the polluted land with blood and crimes.
In this extremity of England's fate,
Led by thy sacred character, I come
For comfort and advice. Thy aged wisdom,
Purg'd from the stormy cloud of human passions,
And by a ray from heaven exalted, sees
Deep thro' futurity. Say what remains,
What yet remains to save our prostrate country?
Nor scorn this anxious question even from me,
A nameless stranger.

HERMIT.

Alfred, England's king,
All hail! and welcome to this humble cell.

ALFRED.

Whence dost thou know me, venerable father?

HERMIT.

Last night, when with a draught from that cool fountain
I had my wholesome sober supper crown'd;
As is my stated custom, forth I walk'd,
Beneath the solemn gloom, and glittering sky,
To feed my soul with prayer and meditation.
And thus to inward harmony compos'd,
That sweetest music of the grateful heart,
Whose each emotion is a silent hymn,
I to my couch retir'd. Strait on mine eyes
A pleasing slumber fell, whose mystic power
Seal'd up my senses, but enlarg'd my soul.
At once, disclos'd amid the dark waste night,
Appear'd a vision—not the dream of fancy,
But sent from heaven, prophetic and divine.
For know, this ample element contains
Unnumber'd spiritual beings, or malign,
Or good to man. These, when the grosser eye
Of Nature sleeps, oft play their several parts,
As on a scene, before th' attentive mind,
And to the favour'd man disclose the future.
Led by these spirits friendly to this isle,
I liv'd thro' future ages; felt the virtue,
The great the glorious passions that will fire
Distant posterity: when guardian laws
Are by the patriot in the glowing senate
Won from corruption; when th' impatient arm
Of liberty, invincible, shall scourge
The tyrants of mankind—and when the deep,
Thro' all her swelling waves, shall proudly joy
Beneath the boundless empire of thy sons.

I saw thee, Alfred, too—But o'er thy fortunes
Lay clouds impenetrable.

ALFRED.

Ah, good hermit,
That scene is dark indeed! Ye awful powers!
To what am I reserv'd? Still muſt I roam
A wanderer here, inglorious and unknown?
Or am I destin'd your great instrument,
From fierce oppression to redeem this land?

HERMIT.

Perhaps, the last.—But, prince, remember, then,
The vows, the noble uses, of affliction.
Preserve the quick humanity it gives,
The pitying, social sense of human weakness:
Yet keep thy stubborn fortitude entire,
The manly heart that to another's woe
Is tender, but superior to its own.
Learn to submit; yet learn to conquer fortune.
Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds
And offices of life: to life itself,
With all its vain and transient joys, sit loose.
Chief, let devotion to the sovereign mind,
A steady, chearful, absolute dependance
On his beſt, wisest government, possess thee.
In thoughtless, gay prosperity, when all
Attends our wish, when nought is seen around us
But kneeling flattery, and obedient fortune;
Then are blind mortals apt, within themselves
To fix their stay, forgetful of the giver.
But when thus humbled, Alfred, as thou art,
When to their feeble natural powers reduc'd,
'Tis then they feel this universal truth——
That heaven is all in all—and man is nothing.

ALFRED.

I thank thee father, for thy pious counsel.
And witness, thou dread Power! who seest my heart;
That if not to perform my regal task,
To be the common father of my people,
Patron of honour, virtue, and religion;
If not to shelter industry, to guard
Her honest portion from oppressive pride,
From wasteful riot, and the sons of rapine,
Who basely ravish what they dare not earn;
If not to deal out justice, like the sun,
With equal light; if not to spread thy bounty,
The treasures trusted to me, not my own,
On all the smiling ranks of nourish'd life;
If not to raise our drooping English name,
To clothe it yet with terror; make this land
Renown'd for peaceful arts to bless mankind,
And generous war to humble proud oppressors:
If not to build on an eternal base,
On liberty and laws, the public weal:
If not for these great ends I am ordain'd,
May I ne'er idly fill the throne of England!

HERMIT.

Still may thy breast these sentiments retain,
In prosperous life.

ALFRED.

Prosperity were ruin,
Could it destroy or change such thoughts as these.
When Those whom Heaven distinguishes o'er millions,
Profusely gives them honours, riches, power,
Whate'er th' expanded heart can wish; when they,
Accepting the reward, neglect the duty;

Or worse, pervert those gifts to deeds of ruin:
Is there a wretch they rule so mean as they?
Guilty, at once, of sacrilege to Heaven,
And of perfidious robbery to men——
But hark! methinks I hear a plaintive voice
Sigh thro' the vale, and wake the mournful echo.

SONG.

Sweet valley, say, where, pensive lying,
For me, our children, England, sighing,
The best of mortals leans his head.
Ye fountains, dimpled by my sorrow,
Ye brooks that my complainings borrow,
O lead me to his lonely bed:
Or if my lover,
Deep woods, you cover,
Ah whisper where your ſhadows o'er him spread!

'Tis not the loss of pomp and pleasure,
Of empire or of tinsel treasure,
That drops this tear, that swells this groan:
No; from a nobler cause proceeding,
A heart with love and fondness bleeding,
I breathe my sadly-pleasing moan,
With other anguish,
I scorn to languiſh:
For Love will feel no sorrows but his own.

SCENE VI.

ALFRED, HERMIT, ELTRUDA, *advancing.*

ALFRED.

Sure by the voice, and purport of the song,
This generous mourner is my queen Eltruda.

And yet how can that be?—O all good Powers!
'Tis she! 'tis she!

ELTRUDA.

My lord, my life, my Alfred!
Oh take me to thy arms; with toil o'ercome,
And sudden transport, thus at once to find thee,
In this wild forest, pathless and perplext!

ALFRED.

Come to my soul, thou dearest, best of women!
Come, and repose thy sorrows in my bosom.
O all my passions mix in doubtful strife!
If pain or joy prevail, I scarce can say,
While thus I clasp thee, and recal the perils
To which thy trembling steps have been expos'd.
Why hast thou left the convent where I plac'd thee?
Why, unprotected, trust thee to a land,
A barbarous land, where rages Danish war!
Our hospitable England is no more!

ELTRUDA.

Dire was the cause, my Alfred. The rous'd country,
All wild in breathless terror and confusion,
Inform'd us, a near party of the Danes,
Whose brutal fury spares no sex, no age,
No place however privileg'd or holy,
Were on full march that way. Instant I fled,
In this disguise with only these attendants:
But in our way oft chear'd by airy voices,
To bear to this retreat our helpless children.

ALFRED.

Ah wanderers too young! ah hapless children!
But more unhappy Sire! who cannot give,
To those he loves, protection.

ELTRUDA.

Thou too, Alfred,
Art thou not unattended? None to serve thee,
To sooth thy woes, to watch thy broken slumbers!
And when the silent tear o'erflows thy eye,
None, with the warm and cordial lip of love,
To kiss it off! There is in love a power,
There is a soft divinity, that draws
Transport even from distress; that gives the heart
A certain pang, excelling far the joys
Of gross unfeeling life. Besides, my Alfred,
Even had the fury of this barbarous foe
Not forc'd me from the convent, life is short;
And now it trembles on the wing of danger;
Why should we loose it then? One well-sav'd hour,
In such a tender circumstance to lovers,
Is better than an age of common time.

ALFRED.

Oh, 'tis too much! thy tenderness o'ercomes me!
Nay, look not on me with that sweet dejection,
Thro' tears that pierce my soul!—Chear thee, my love;
Hope still the best; that better days await us,
And fairer from remembrance.—Thou, Eltruda,
Thou art a pledge of happiness! On thee
Good angels wait; they led thy journey hither:
And I have heard them, in this wild retreat,
Warbling immortal airs, and strains of comfort.—
But, ah, the foe is round us: and this isle
Now holds my soul's best wealth, the treasur'd store
Of all my joys.—I go to skirt it round,
To visit every creek and sedgy bank,
Where rustles thro' the reeds the shadowy gale;
Or where the bending umbrage drinks the stream;

Lest danger unawares should steal upon us.
And now, by slow degrees, solemn and sad,
Wide-falling o'er the world, the nightly shades
Hush the brown woods and deepen all their horrors:
While humbled into rest, and aw'd by darkness,
Each creature seeks the covert. To that cell
Retire, my life. I will not long be absent.

ACT II. SCENE I.

ALFRED *alone.*

'Tis now the depth of darkness and repose.
All nature seems to rest: while Alfred wakes
To think, and to be wretched.—Where yon oak
With wide and dusky shade o'erhangs the stream,
That glides in silence by, I took my stand:
What time the glow-worm thro' the dewy path
First shot his twinkling flame. I stood attentive,
Listening each noise from wood-clad hill and dale;
But all was hush'd around. Nor trumpet's clang,
Nor shout of roving foe, nor hasty tread
Of evening passenger, disturb'd the wide
And awful stillness. Homeward as I sped,
O'er many a delve, thro' many a path perplext,
Maze running into maze; ill-boding thoughts
Haunted my steps.—Perhaps my gallant friend,
Discover'd to the Danes, this moment bleeds
Beneath their swords! or lies a breathless corse,
The prey of midnight wolves.—Some mournful sound
Strikes sudden on my sense.

SCENE II.

ALFRED, ELTRUDA.

ELTRUDA.

Here will I lean
On this green bank, to wait the wish'd return
Of morning and my lord.

ALFRED.

My gentle love,
Eltruda, why to this untimely sky
Expose thy health? The dews of night fall fast:
The chill breeze sighs aloud.

ELTRUDA.

I could not rest.
Can love repose when apprehension wakes,
And whispers to the heart all dreadful things,
That walk with night and solitude? Methought,
In each low murmur of the woods, I heard
Th' invading foe—or heard my Alfred groan!
Our tender infants too—their fancy'd cries
Still sound within my ears!

ALFRED.

Eltruda, there
I am a woman too: I who should chear,
And shelter thee from every care. My children!
The thought of what may chance to them, completes
Their father's sum of woes. O what safe shade
Can skreen their opening blossom from the storm
That beats severe on us! Not sweeter buds
The primrose in the vale, nor sooner shrinks
At winter's churlish blast——

ELTRUDA.

Behold, my lord—
Good angels shield us—What a flood of brightness
Waves round our heads!

ALFRED.

The hermit moves this way.
That wondrous man holds converse with the host

Of higher natures. These far beaming fires
Were doubtless kindled up at his command.
Be silent and attentive.

SCENE III.

ALFRED, ELTRUDA, HERMIT.

HERMIT.

I have heard
Thy fond complainings, Alfred.

ALFRED.

You have then,
Good father, heard the cause that wrings them from me.

HERMIT.

The human race are sons of sorrow born:
And each must have his portion. Vulgar minds
Refuse, or crouch beneath their load: the brave
Bear theirs without repining.

ALFRED.

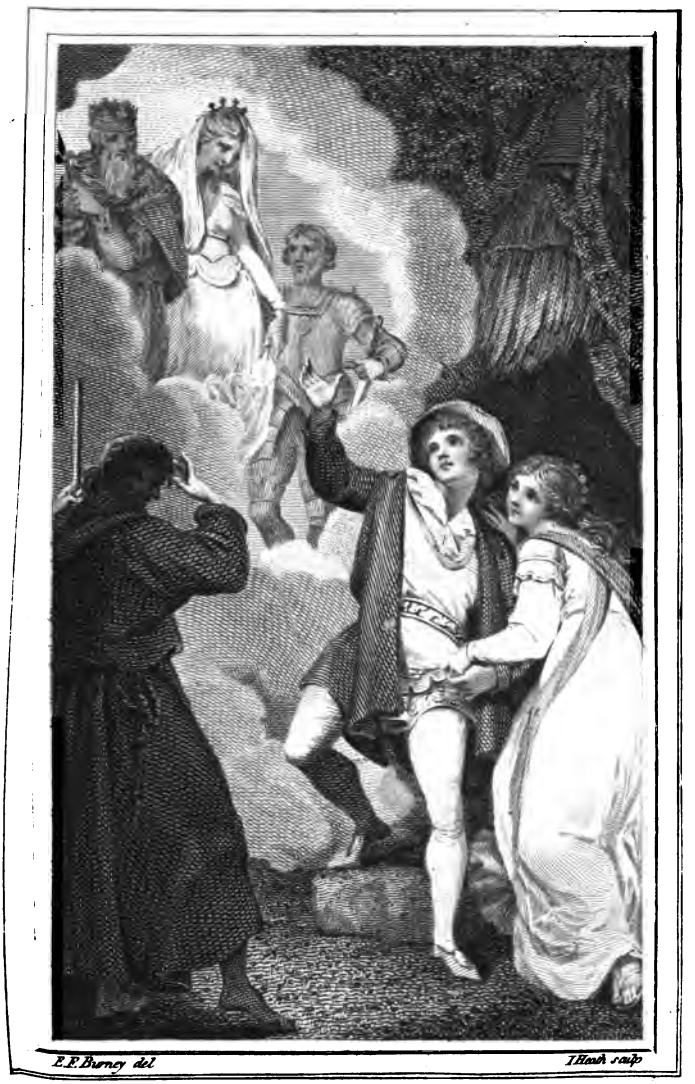
Who can bear
The shaft that wounds him thro' an infant's side?
When whom we love, to whom we owe protection,
Implore the hand we cannot reach to save them?

HERMIT.

Weep not, Eltruda.——Yet thou art a king,
All private passions fall before that name.
Thy subjects claim thee whole.

ALFRED.

Can public trust,
O reverend sage! destroy the softer ties



E.F. Burney del. I. Heath sculp.

ALFRED.

Act 2d. Scene 3d.

Published as the Act directs March 1st. 1788. by T. Cadell, Strand.

That twine around the parent's yearning heart,
That holy passion Heaven itself infus'd,
And blended with the stream that feeds our life?

HERMIT.

You love your children, prince—

ALFRED.

Lives there on earth,
In air, or ocean, creature tame or wild,
That has not known this universal love?
All Nature feels it intimate and deep,
And all her sons of instinct or of reason.

HERMIT.

Then shew that passion in its noblest form.
Season their tender years with every virtue,
Social or self-retir'd; of public greatness,
Or lovely in the hour of private life;
With all that can exalt, or can adorn
Their princely rank.

ALFRED.

Alas, their hope must stoop,
Such my unhappy fate, to humbler aims:
Affliction and base want must be their teachers.

HERMIT.

Affliction is the wholesome soil of virtue:
Where patience, honour, sweet humanity,
Calm fortitude take root, and strongly flourish.
But prosperous fortune, that allures with pleasure,
Dazzles with pomp, and undermines with flattery,
Poisons the soil, and its best product kills.
Should'st thou regain thy throne—

ALFRED.

My throne? What glimpse,
What smallest ray of hope——

HERMIT.

That day may come—
What do I feel? My labouring breast expands
To give the glorious inspiration room.
And now the cloud that o'er thy future fate,
Like total night, lay heavy and obscure,
Fades into air: and all the brightening scene
Dawns gay before me! A long line of kings,
From thee descending, glorious and renown'd,
In shadowy pomp I see!

Genius of England! hovering near,
In all thy radiant charms appear.

O come and summon, from the world unknown,
Those mighty chiefs, those sons of future fame,
Who, ages hence, this island shall adorn,
And spread to distant realms her glorious name.
Slow let the visionary forms arise,
And solemn pass before our wondering eyes.

[*Music grand and awful. The Genius descending sings the following*

SONG.

From those eternal regions bright,
Where suns, that never set in night,
Diffuse the golden day:
Where Spring, unfading, pours around,
O'er all the dew-impearled ground,
Her thousand colours gay:

O whether on the fountain's flowery side,
Whence living waters glide,
Or in the fragrant grove,
Whose shade embosoms peace and love,
New pleasures ally our hours employ,
And ravish every sense with every joy!
Great heirs of empire! yet unborn,
Who shall this island late adorn;
A monarch's drooping thought to chear,
Appear! appear! appear!

Spirits of EDWARD III. PHILIPPA *his queen, and the* BLACK PRINCE *his son, arise.*

HERMIT.

Alfred, look; and say,
What seest thou yonder?

ALFRED.

Three majestic shapes:
Two habited like mighty warriors old;
A third in whose bright aspect beauty smiles
More soft and feminine. A lucid veil,
From her fair neck dependant floats around,
Light-hovering in the gale.

HERMIT.

O Alfred, man
Belov'd of Heaven, behold a king *indeed;*
Matchless in arms; in arts of peaceful rule,
A sovereign's truest glory, yet more fam'd,
England's third Edward!—At his fear'd approach,
Proud France, even now, thro' all her dukedoms quakes.
Her Genius sighs: and from th' eternal shore,
The soul of her great Charles, a recent guest,
Looks back to earth, and mourns the distant woes

His realms are doom'd to feel from Edward's wrath.
Beneath his standard, Britain shall go forth,
Array'd for conquest, terrible in glory:
And nations shrink before her. O what deaths,
What desolation shall her vengeance spread,
From engines yet unfound; whose lightnings flash,
Whose thunders roar, amazing, o'er the plain:
As if this king had summon'd from on high
Heaven's dread artillery to fight his battle!
Nor is renown in war his sole ambition:
A nobler passion labours in his breast——
Alfred attend—to make his people blest!
The sacred rights that reason loudly claims
For free-born men—these, Alfred, are his care:
Oft to confirm, and fix them on the base
Of equal laws.—O father of mankind!
Successive praises from a grateful land
Shall saint thy name for ever!

ALFRED.

Holy sage,
Whom angels thus enlighten and inspire,
My bosom kindles at thy heaven-born flame.
Great Edward! Be thy conquests and their praise
Unrival'd to thyself. But O thy fame
For care paternal of the public weal!
For England blest at home—my rapt heart pants
To equal that renown!

HERMIT.

Know farther, Alfred;
A sovereign's great example forms a people.
The public breast is noble, or is vile,
As he inspires it. In this Edward's time,

Warm'd by his courage, by his honour rais'd,
High flames the British spirit like the sun,
To shine o'er half the globe: and where it shines,
The cherish'd world to brighten and enrich.
Last see this monarch in his hour of leisure;
Even social on a throne, and tasting joys
To solitary greatness seldom known,
As friend, as husband, and as father blest.
That god-like *youth* remark, his eldest hope,
Who gives new lustre to the name he bears;
A hero ere a man.—I see him now
On Cressy's glorious plain! The father's heart,
With anxious love and wonder at his daring,
Beats high in mingled transport. Great himself,
Great above *jealousy*, the guilty mark
That brands all meaner minds, see, he applauds
The *filial excellence*, and gives him scope
To blaze in his full brightness!—Lo, again
He sends him dreadful to a nobler field:
The danger and the glory all his own!
A *captive king*, the rival of his arms,
I see adorn his triumph! Heaven! what grace,
What splendor from his gracious temper mild
That triumph draws! As gentle mercy kind,
He chears the hostile prince whose fall he weeps!

ALFRED.

A son so rich in virtues, and so grac'd
With all that gives those virtues fair to shine,
When I would ask of Heaven some mighty boon,
Should claim the foremost place.

HERMIT.

Remember then,
What to thy infant sons from thee is due,
As parent and as prince.

ELTRUDA.

Forgive me, Hermit,
Forgive a queen and wife her anxious fondness.
Yon beauteous shade, that as I gaze her o'er,
My wonder draws, escapes your graver thought.

HERMIT.

O bright Eltruda! thou whose blooming youth,
Whose amiable sweetness promise blessings
To Alfred and to England! see, and mark,
In yonder pleasing form, the best of wives,
The happiest too, repaid with all the faith,
With all the friendship, love and duty claim.
She, powerful o'er the heart her charms enslave—
O virtue rarely practis'd!—uses nobly
That happy influence; to prompt each purpose
Fair honour kindles in her Edward's breast.
Amid the pomps, the pleasures of a court,
Humble of heart, severely good; the friend
Of modest worth, the parent of the poor.
Eltruda! O transmit these noblest charms
To that fair *daughter*, that unfolding rose,
With which, *as on this day**, Heaven crown'd your loves.

Spirit of ELIZABETH *arises.*

ALFRED.

Say, who is she, in whom the noble graces,
Th' engaging manner, dignity, and ease,
Are join'd with manly sense and resolution?

* This masque was written to be acted at Cliffden, on the birth-day of her royal highness the princess Augusta.

HERMIT.

The great Eliza. She, amid a world
That threatning swells in high commotion round her;
Each dangerous state her unrelenting foe,
And chief a proud enormous empire stretch'd
O'er half mankind; with not one friendly power,
But what her kind creating hand shall raise
From out the marshes of the branching Rhine;
And min'd, at home, her ever-tottering throne
By restless bigots, who, beneath the mask
Of mild religion, are to every crime
Set loose, the faithless sons of barbarous zeal:
Yet she shall crown this happy isle with peace,
With arts, with riches, grandeur, and renown;
And quell, by turns, the madness of her foes.
As when the winds, from different quarters, urge
The tempest on our shore; secure the cliffs
Repel its idle rage, and pour it back,
In broken billows, foaming to the main.

ALFRED.

How shall she, Hermit, gain these glorious ends?

HERMIT.

By silent wisdom, whose informing power
Works unperceiv'd: that seems in council slow;
But, when resolv'd, and ripe for execution,
That darts like lightning from the secret gloom:
By ever seizing the right *point of view*,
Her truest interest; which she firm pursues,
With steady patience, thro' the maze of state,
The storm of opposition, the mixt views,
And thwarting manag'd passions of mankind:
By healing the divisions of her people,
And sowing the fell pest among her foes:

By saving, from the vermin of a court,
Her treasure; which, when fair occasion calls,
She knows to lavish, in protecting arts,
In guarding nations, and in nursing states:
By calling up to power, and public life,
Each virtue, each ability; yet *she*,
Amid the various worthies glowing round her
Still shines the first; the central sun that wakes,
That rules their every motion: not the slave,
And passive property of her own creatures.
But the great soul that animates her reign,
That lights it to perfection, is the love,
The confidence unbounded, which her wisdom,
Her probity and justice, shall inspire
Into the public breast. Hence cordial faith,
Which nought can shake; hence unexhausted treasure:
And hence, above all mercenary force,
The hand that by the free-born heart is rais'd,
And guards the blended weal of prince and people.
She too shall raise Britannia's naval power;
Shall greatly ravish, from insulting Spain,
The world-commanding sceptre of the deep.

ELTRUDA.

O matchless queen! O glory of her sex!
The great idea, father, fills my soul,
And bids it glow beyond a woman's passions.

Spirit of WILLIAM III. *arises.*

HERMIT.

Once more, O Alfred, raise thine eyes, and mark,
Who next adorns the scene, yon laurel'd *shade*.
Ere yet the age that clos'd this female reign

Hath led around its train of circling years,
Shall Britain on the verge of ruin stand.
A monarch, lost to greatness, to renown,
The slave of dreaming monks, shall fill her throne,
Weak and aspiring; fond of lawless rule,
The lawless rule his mean ambition covets
Unequal to acquire. Yon prince thou saw'st,
To glory tutor'd by the hand severe
Of sharp Adversity, shall Heaven upraise,
And injur'd nations with joint call invoke,
Their last, their only refuge. Lo! he comes:
Wide o'er the billows of the boundless deep
His navy rides triumphant: and the shores
Of shouting Albion echo with his name.
Immortal William! from before his face,
Flies Superstition, flies oppressive Power,
With vile Servility that crouch'd and kiss'd
The whip he trembled at. From this great hour
Shall Britain date her rights and laws restor'd:
And one high purpose rule her sovereign's heart;
To scourge the pride of France, that foe profess'd
To England and to freedom. Yet I see,
From distant climes in peaceful triumph borne,
Another KING arise! His early youth
With verdant laurel crown'd, for deeds of arms
That Reason's voice approves; for courage, rais'd
Beyond all aid from passion, greatly calm!
Intrepidly serene!—In days of peace,
Around his throne the human virtues wait,
And fair adorn him with their mildest beams;
Good without show, above ambition great;
Wise, equal, merciful, the friend of man!
O Alfred! should thy fate, long ages hence,
In meaning scenes recall'd, exalt the joy

Of some glad festal day, before a *prince*
Sprung from that king belov'd—Hear, gracious Heaven!
Thy soft humanity, thy patriot heart,
Thy manly virtue, steady, great, resolv'd,
Be his supreme ambition! and with these,
The happiness, the glory, that await
Thy better days, be shower'd upon his head!

ALFRED.

O Hermit! thou hast rais'd me to new life!
New hopes, new triumphs swell my bounding heart—

HERMIT.

It comes! it comes!—The promis'd scene discloses!
Already the great work of Fate begins!
The mighty wheels are turning, whence will spread,
Beyond the limits of our narrow world,
The fair dominions, Alfred, of thy sons.
Behold the warrior bright with Danish spoils!—
The *raven* droops his wings—and hark! the trumpet,
Exulting, speaks the rest.

SCENE IV.

Symphony of martial music.

ALFRED, ELTRUDA, HERMIT, *Earl of* DEVON, *followed by Soldiers.*

ALFRED.

My friend return'd!
O welcome, welcome! but what happy tidings
Smile in thy chearful countenance?——

DEVON.

My Liege,
Your troops have been successful. But to Heaven
Ascend the praise! For sure th' event exceeds
The hand of man.

ALFRED.

How was it, noble Devon?

DEVON.

You know my castle is not hence far distant.
Thither I sped: and in a Danish habit
The trenches passing, by a secret way,
Known to myself alone, emerg'd at once
Amid my joyful soldiers. There I found
A generous few, the veteran, hardy gleanings
Of many a hapless fight. They with a fierce
Heroic fire inspirited each other;
Resolv'd on death, disdaining to survive
Their dearest country.—" If we fall," I cry'd,
" Let us not tamely fall like passive cowards!
" No: let us live—or let us die, like men!
" Come on, my friends: to Alfred we will cut
" Our glorious way; or, as we nobly perish,
" Will offer to the genius of our country
" Whole hecatombs of Danes."—As if one soul
Had mov'd them all, around their heads they flash'd
Their flaming faulchions—" Lead us to those Danes!—
" Our country!—vengeance!" was the general cry.
Strait on the careless drowsy camp we rush'd:
And rapid, as the flame devours the stubble,
Bore down the heartless Danes. With this success
Our enterprize increas'd. Not now contented
To hew a passage thro' the flying herd;
We, unremitting, urg'd a total rout.

The valiant Hubba bites the bloody field,
With twice six hundred Danes around him strow'd.

ALFRED.

My glorious friend!—this action has restor'd
Our sinking country.—What reward can equal
A deed so great?—Is not yon pictur'd *Raven*
Their famous magic standard—Emblem fit
To speak the savage genius of the people—
That oft has scatter'd on our troops dismay,
And feeble consternation?

DEVON.

'Tis the same.
Wrought by the sisters of the Danish king,
Of furious Ivar, in a midnight hour:
While the sick moon at their enchanted song,
Wrapt in pale tempest, labour'd thro' the clouds,
The *Demons* of destruction then, they say,
Were all abroad, and mixing with the woof
Their baleful power: the sisters ever sung;
"Shake, standard, shake, this ruin on our foes!"

HERMIT.

So these infernal powers, with rays of truth,
Still deck their fables, to delude who trust them.

ALFRED.

But where, my noble cousin, are the rest
Of your brave troops?

DEVON.

On t'other side the stream,
That half incloses this retreat, I left them.
Rous'd from the fear, with which it was congeal'd
As in a frost, the country pours amain.

The spirit of our ancestors is up,
The spirit of the Free! and with a voice
That breathes success, they all demand their king.

ALFRED.

Quick, let us join them, and improve their ardor.
We cannot be too hasty to secure
The glances of occasion.

SCENE the Last.

To them CORIN, EMMA, *kneeling to* ALFRED.

CORIN.

Good my Liege,
Pardon the poor unequal entertainment,
Which we, unknowing—

ALFRED.

Rise, my honest shepherd,
I came to thee a peasant, not a prince:
Thy rural entertainment was sincere,
Plain, hospitable, kind: such as, I hope,
Will ever mark the manners of this nation.
You friendly lodg'd me, when by all deserted:
And shall have ample recompence.

CORIN.

One boon
Is all I crave.

ALFRED.

Good shepherd, speak thy wish.

CORIN.

Permission, in your wars, to serve your Grace:
For, tho' here lost in solitary shades,

A simple swain, I bear an English heart:
A heart that burns with rage to see those Danes,
Those foreign ruffians, those inhuman pirates,
Oft our inferiors prov'd, thus lord it o'er us.

ALFRED.

Brave countryman, come on. 'Tis such as thou,
Who from affection serve, and free-born zeal,
To guard whate'er is dear and sacred to them,
That are a king's best honour and defence.

EMMA *sings the following*

SONG.

If those, who live in shepherd's bower,
Press not the rich and stately bed:
The new-mown hay and breathing flower
A softer couch beneath them spread.

If those, who sit at shepherd's board,
Sooth not their taste by wanton art;
They take what Nature's gift afford,
And take it with a chearful heart.

If those who drain the shepherd's bowl,
No high and sparkling wines can boast;
With wholesome cups they chear the soul,
And crown them with the village toast.

If those who join in shepherd's sport,
Gay-dancing on the daisy'd ground,
Have not the splendor of a court;
Yet love adorns the merry round.

ALFRED.

My lov'd Eltruda! thou shalt here remain,
With gentle Emma, and this reverend hermit.
Ye silver streams, that murmuring wind around
This dusky spot, to you I trust my all!

O close around her, woods! for her, ye vales,
Throw forth your flowers, your softest lap diffuse!
And *Thou!* whose secret and expansive hand
Moves all the springs of this vast universe:
Whose government astonishes; who here,
In a few hours, beyond our utmost hope,
Beyond our thought, yet doubting, hast clear'd up
The storm of fate: preserve what thy kind will,
Thy bountiful appointment, makes so dear
To human hearts! preserve my queen and children!
Preserve the hopes of England! while I go
To finish thy great work, and save my country.

ELTRUDA.

Go, pay the debt of honour to the public.
If ever woman, Alfred, lov'd her husband
More fondly than herself, I claim that virtue,
That heart-felt happiness. Yet by our loves
I swear that in a glorious death with thee
I rather would be wrapt, than live long years
To charm thee from the rugged paths of honour:
So much I think thee born for beauteous deeds,
And the bright course of glory.

ALFRED.

Matchless woman!
Love, at thy voice is kindled to ambition.
Be this my dearest triumph, to approve me
A husband worthy of the best Eltruda.

HERMIT.

Behold, my lord, our venerable Bard,
Aged and blind, him whom the Muses favour.
Yet ere you go, in our lov'd country's praise,
That noblest theme, hear what his rapture breathes.

AN ODE.

When Britain first, at Heaven's command,
Arose from out the azure main;
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sung *this* strain:
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
"Britons never will be slaves."

The nations, not so blest as thee,
Must, in their turns to tyrants fall;
While thou shalt flourish, great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.
"Rule, &c."

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful from each foreign stroke;
As the loud blast that tears the skies,
Serves but to root thy native oak.
"Rule, &c."

Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame:
All their attempts to bend thee down,
Will but arouse thy generous flame;
But work their woe, and thy renown.
"Rule, &c."

To thee belongs the rural reign;
Thy cities shall with commerce shine:
All thine shall be the subject main:
And every shore it circles thine.
"Rule, &c."

The Muses, still with Freedom found,
Shall to thy happy coast repair:
Blest isle! with matchless beauty crown'd,
And manly hearts to guard the fair.
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
"Britons never will be slaves."

HERMIT.

Alfred, go forth! lead on the radiant years,
To thee reveal'd in vision.—Lo! they rise!
Lo! patriots, heroes, sages, crowd to birth:
And bards to sing them in immortal verse!
I see thy commerce, Britain, grasp the world:
All nations serve thee; every foreign flood,
Subjected, pays its tribute to the Thames.
Thither the golden South obedient pours
His sunny treasures: thither the soft East
Her spices, delicacies, gentle gifts:
And thither his rough trade the stormy North.
See, where beyond the vast Atlantic surge,
By boldest keels untouch'd, a dreadful space!
Shores, yet unfound, arise! in youthful prime,
With towering forests, mighty rivers crown'd:
These stoop to Britain's thunder. This new world,
Shook to its centre, trembles at her name:
And there her sons, with aim exalted, sow
The seeds of rising empire, arts, and arms.

Britons, proceed, the subject Deep command,
Awe with your navies every hostile land.
Vain are their threats, their armies all are vain:
They rule the balanc'd world, who rule the main.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

A

TRAGEDY.

ADVERTISEMENT.

This play is considerably shortened in the performance; but I hope it will not be disagreeable to the Reader to see it as it was at first written; there being a great difference betwixt a play in the closet, and upon the stage.

TO

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS

FREDERICK,

PRINCE OF WALES.

SIR,

THE honour your ROYAL HIGHNESS has done me in the protection you was pleased to give to this tragedy, emboldens me to lay it now at your feet, and beg your permission to publish it under your Royal patronage. The favouring and protecting of letters has been in all ages and countries, one distinguishing mark of a great prince; and that with good reason, not only as it shews a justness of taste and elevation of mind, but as the influence of such a protection, by exciting good writers to labour with more emulation in the improvement of their several talents, not a little contributes to the embellishment and instruction of society. But of all the different species of writing, none has such an effect upon the lives and manners of men, as the dramatic; and, therefore, that of all others most deserves the attention of princes; who, by a judicious approbation of such pieces as tend to promote all public and private virtue, may, more than by any coercive methods, secure the purity of the stage; and in consequence thereof greatly advance the

morals and politeness of their people. How eminently your ROYAL HIGHNESS has always extended your favour and patronage to every art and science, and in a particular manner to dramatic performances, is too well known to the world for me to mention it here. Allow me only to wish, that what I have now the honour to offer to your ROYAL HIGHNESS, may be judged not unworthy of your protection, at least in the *sentiments* which it inculcates. A warm and grateful sense of your goodness to me, makes me desirous to seize every occasion of declaring in public, with what profound respect and dutiful attachment I am,

SIR,

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS'S

Most obliged,

Most obedient, and

Most devoted Servant,

JAMES THOMSON.

PROLOGUE.

BOLD is the man! who, in this nicer age,
Presumes to tread the chaste corrected stage.
Now, with gay tinsel arts, we can no more
Conceal the want of Nature's sterling ore.
Our spells are vanish'd, broke our magic wand,
That us'd to waft you over sea and land.
Before your *light* the fairy people fade,
The demons fly—The ghost itself is laid.
In vain of martial scenes the loud alarms,
The mighty prompter thundering out to arms,
The playhouse posse clattering from afar,
The close-wedg'd battle, and the din of war.
Now, even the senate seldom we convene;
The yawning fathers nod behind the scene.
Your taste rejects the glittering false sublime,
To sigh in metaphor, and die in rhyme.
High *rant* is tumbled from his gallery throne:
Description dreams—nay, similies are gone.

What shall we then? to please you how devise
Whose judgment sits not in your ears and eyes?
Thrice happy! could we catch great *Shakespeare's* art,
To trace the deep recesses of the heart;
His simple plain sublime, to which is given
To strike the soul with darted flame from heaven:
Could we awake soft *Otway's* tender woe,
The pomp of verse and golden lines of *Rowe.*

We to your hearts apply: let them attend;
Before their silent candid bar we bend.
If warm'd, they listen, 'tis our noblest praise;
If cold, they wither all the Muse's bays.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

TANCRED, Count of Leece, -	Mr. GARRICK.
MATTEO SIFFREDI, Lord High Chancellor of Sicily, - - -	Mr. SHERIDAN.
Earl OSMOND, Lord High Constable of Sicily, - - - -	Mr. DELANE.
RODOLPHO, Friend to Tancred, and Captain of the Guards, - -	Mr. HAVARD.
SIGISMUNDA, Daughter of Siffredi,	MRS. CIBBER.
LAURA, Sister of Rodolpho, and Friend to Sigismunda, - - -	Miss BUDGEL.

Barons, Officers, Guards, &c.

SCENE, The City of Palermo in Sicily.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah fatal day to Sicily! The king
Approaches his last moments!

LAURA.

So 'tis fear'd.

SIGISMUNDA.

The death of those distinguish'd by their station,
But by their virtue more, awakes the mind
To solemn dread, and strikes a saddening awe:
Not that we grieve for them, but for ourselves,
Left to the toil of life—And yet the best
Are, by the playful children of this world,
At once forgot, as they had never been.
Laura, 'tis said—the heart is sometimes charg'd
With a prophetic sadness: such, methinks,
Now hangs on mine. The king's approaching death

Suggests a thousand fears. What troubles thence
May throw the state once more into confusion,
What sudden changes in my father's house
May rise, and part me from my dearest Tancred,
Alarms my thought.

LAURA.

The fears of love-sick fancy!
Perversely busy to torment itself.
But be assur'd, your father's steady friendship,
Join'd to a certain genius, that commands,
Not kneels to fortune, will support and cherish,
Here in the public eye of Sicily,
This—I may call him—his adopted son,
The noble Tancred, form'd to all his virtues.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah form'd to charm his daughter!—This fair morn
Has tempted far the chace. Is he not yet
Return'd?

LAURA.

No.—When your father to the king,
Who now expiring lies, was call'd in haste,
He sent each way his messengers to find him;
With such a look of ardor and impatience,
As if this near event was to count Tancred
Of more importance than I comprehend.

SIGISMUNDA.

There lies, my Laura, o'er my Tancred's birth
A cloud I cannot pierce. With princely accost,
Nay, with respect, which oft I have observ'd,
Stealing at times submissive o'er his features,
In Belmont's woods my father rear'd this youth—
Ah woods! where first my artless bosom learnt

The sighs of love.—He gives him out the son
Of an old friend, a baron of Apulia,
Who in the late crusado bravely fell.
But then 'tis strange; is all his family
As well as father dead? and all their friends,
Except my sire, the generous good Siffredi?
Had he a mother, sister, brother, left,
The last remain of kindred; with what pride,
What rapture, might they fly o'er earth and sea,
To claim this rising honour of their blood!
This bright unknown! this all accomplish'd youth!
Who charms—too much—the heart of Sigismunda!
Laura, perhaps your brother knows him better,
The friend and partner of his freest hours.
What says Rodolpho? Does he truly credit
This story of his birth?

LAURA,

He has sometimes,
Like you his doubts; yet when maturely weigh'd,
Believes it true. As for lord Tancred's self,
He never entertain'd the slightest thought
That virg'd to doubt; but oft laments his state,
By cruel fortune so ill-pair'd to yours,

SIGISMUNDA.

Merit like his, the fortune of the mind,
Beggars all wealth—Then, to your brother, Laura,
He talks of me?

LAURA.

Of nothing else. Howe'er
The talk begin, it ends with Sigismunda.
Their morning, noontide, and their evening walks
Are full of you; and all the woods of Belmont
Inamour'd with your name——

SIGISMUNDA.

Away, my friend;
You flatter——Yet the dear delusion charms.

LAURA.

No, Sigismunda, 'tis the strictest truth,
Nor half the truth, I tell you. Even with fondness
My brother talks for ever of the passion
That fires young Tancred's breast. So much it strikes him,
He praises love as if he were a lover.
He blames the false pursuits of vagrant youth,
Calls them gay folly, a mistaken struggle
Against best-judging Nature. Heaven, he says,
In lavish bounty form'd the heart for love;
In love included all the finer seeds
Of honour, virtue, friendship, purest bliss——

SIGISMUNDA.

Virtuous Rodolpho!

LAURA.

Then his pleasing theme
He varies to the praises of your lover——

SIGISMUNDA.

And what, my Laura, says he on the subject?

LAURA.

He says, that, tho' he were not nobly born,
Nature has form'd him noble, generous, brave,
Truly magnanimous, and warmly scorning
Whatever bears the smallest taint of baseness:
That every easy virtue is his own;
Not learnt by painful labour, but inspir'd,
Implanted in his soul—Chiefly one charm
He in his graceful character observes;

That tho' his passions burn with high impatience,
And sometimes, from a noble heat of nature,
Are ready to fly off; yet the least check
Of ruling reason brings them back to temper,
And gentle softness.

SIGISMUNDA.

True! O true, Rodolpho!
Blest be thy kindred worth for loving his!
He is all warmth, all amiable fire,
All quick heroic ardor! temper'd soft
With gentleness of heart, and manly reason!
If Virtue were to wear a human form,
To light it with her dignity and flame,
Then soft'ning mix her smiles and tender graces;
O she would chuse the person of my Tancred!
Go on, my friend, go on, and ever praise him;
The subject knows no bounds, nor can I tire,
While my breast trembles to that sweetest music!
The heart of woman tastes no truer joy,
Is never flatter'd with such dear enchantment——
'Tis more than selfish vanity—as when
She hears the praises of the man she loves——

LAURA.

Madam, your father comes.

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI, SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIFFREDI.

[*To an Attendant as he enters.*
Lord Tancred then
Is found?

ATTENDANT.

My lord, he quickly will be here.
I scarce could keep before him, tho' he bid me
Speed on, to say he would attend your orders.

SIFFREDI.

'Tis well—retire—You, too, my daughter, leave me.

SIGISMUNDA.

I go, my father, But how fares the king?

SIFFREDI.

He is no more. Gone to that awful state,
Where kings the crown wear only of their virtues.

SIGISMUNDA.

How bright must then be his!—This stroke is sudden.
He was this morning well, when to the chace
Lord Tancred went.

SIFFREDI.

'Tis true. But at his years
Death gives short notice—Drooping nature then,
Without a gust of pain to shake it, falls.
His death, my daughter, was that happy period
Which few attain. The duties of his day
Were all discharg'd, and gratefully enjoy'd
It's noblest blessings; calm as evening skies,
Was his pure mind, and lighted up with hopes
That open heaven; when, for his last long sleep
Timely prepar'd, a lassitude of life,
A pleasing weariness of mortal joy,
Fell on his soul, and down he sunk to rest.
O may my death be such!——He but one wish
Left unfulfill'd, which was to see count Tancred——

SIGISMUNDA.

To see count Tancred!—Pardon me, my lord——

SIFFREDI.

For what, my daughter?—But, with such emotion,
Why did you start at mention of count Tancred?

SIGISMUNDA.

Nothing—I only hop'd the dying king
Might mean to make some generous just provision
For this your worthy charge, this noble orphan.

SIFFREDI.

And he has done it largely—Leave me now—
I want some private conference with lord Tancred.

SCENE III.

SIFFREDI *alone.*

My doubts are but too true—If these old eyes
Can trace the marks of love, a mutual passion
Has seiz'd, I fear, my daughter and this prince,
My sovereign now—Should it be so? Ah there,
There lurks a brooding tempest, that may shake
My long concerted scheme, to settle firm
The public peace and welfare, which the king
Has made the prudent basis of his will——
Away! unworthy views! you shall not tempt me!
Nor interest, nor ambition shall seduce
My fixt resolve——perish the selfish thought,
Which our own good prefers to that of millions!—
He comes—my king—unconscious of his fortune.

SCENE. IV.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI.

TANCRED.

My lord Siffredi, in your looks I read,
Confirm'd, the mournful news that fly abroad
From tongue to tongue—We then, at last, have lost
The good old king?

SIFFREDI.

Yes, we have lost a father!
The greatest blessing Heaven bestows on mortals,
And seldom found amidst these wilds of time.
A good, a worthy king!—Hear me, my Tancred,
And I will tell thee, in a few plain words,
How he deserv'd that best, that glorious title.
'Tis nought complex, 'tis clear as truth and virtue.
He lov'd his people, deem'd them all his children;
The good exalted, and depress'd the bad.
He spurn'd the flattering crew, with scorn rejected
Their smooth advice that only means themselves,
Their schemes to aggrandize him into baseness:
Nor did he less disdain the secret breath,
The whisper'd tale, that blights a virtuous name.
He sought alone the good of those for whom
He was entrusted with the sovereign power:
Well knowing that a people in their rights
And industry protected; living safe
Beneath the sacred shelter of the laws,
Encourag'd in their genius, arts, and labours,
And happy each as he himself deserves,

Are ne'er ungrateful. With unsparing hand
They will for him provide: their filial love
And confidence are his unfailing treasure,
And every honest man his faithful guard.

TANCRED.

A general face of grief o'erspreads the city.
I mark'd the people, as I hither came,
In crowds assembled, struck with silent sorrow,
And pouring forth the noblest praise of tears.
Those, whom remembrance of their former woes,
And long experience of the vain illusions
Of youthful hope, had into wise consent
And fear of change corrected, wrung their hands,
And often casting up their eyes to heaven,
Gave sign of sad conjecture. Others shew'd,
Athwart their grief, or real or affected,
A gleam of expectation, from what chance
And change might bring. A mingled murmur run
Along the streets; and, from the lonely court
Of him who can no more assist their fortunes,
I saw the courtier-fry, with eager haste,
All hurrying to Constantia.

SIFFREDI.

Noble youth!
I joy to hear from thee these just reflections,
Worthy of riper years—But if they seek
Constantia, trust me, they mistake their course.

TANCRED.

How! is she not, my lord, the late king's sister,
Heir to the crown of Sicily? the last
Of our fam'd Norman line, and now our queen?

SIFFREDI.

Tancred, 'tis true; she is the late king's sister,
The sole surviving offspring of that tyrant
William the Bad—so for his vices stil'd;
Who spilt much noble blood, and sore oppress'd
Th' exhausted land: whence grievous wars arose,
And many a dire convulsion shook the state,
When he, whose death Sicilia mourns to-day,
William, who has and well deserv'd the name
Of Good, succeeding to his father's throne,
Reliev'd his country's woes—But to return—
She is the late king's sister, born some months
After the tyrant's death, but not next heir.

TANCRED.

You much surprise me—May I then presume
To ask who is?

SIFFREDI.

Come nearer, noble Tancred,
Son of my care! I must, on this occasion,
Consult thy generous heart; which, when conducted
By rectitude of mind and honest virtues,
Gives better counsel than the hoary head—
Then know, their lives a prince, here in Palermo,
The lineal offspring of our famous hero,
Roger the First.

TANCRED.

Great Heaven!—How far remov'd
From that our mighty founder?

SIFFREDI.

His great grandson:
Sprung from his eldest son, who died untimely,
Before his father.

TANCRED.

Ha! the prince you mean
Is he not Manfred's son? The generous, brave,
Unhappy Manfred! whom the tyrant William
You just now mention'd, not content to spoil
Of his paternal crown, threw into fetters,
And infamously murder'd?

SIFFREDI.

Yes—the same.

TANCRED.

By Heavens! I joy to find our Norman reign,
The world's sole light amidst these barbarous ages!
Yet rears its head; and shall not, from the lance,
Pass to the feeble distaff—But this prince
Where has he lain conceal'd?

SIFFREDI.

The late good king,
By noble pity mov'd, contriv'd to save him
From his dire father's unrelenting rage,
And had him rear'd in private, as became
His birth and hopes, with high and princely nurture.
Till now, too young to rule a troubled state,
By civil broils most miserably torn,
He in his safe retreat has lain conceal'd,
His birth and fortune to himself unknown;
But when the dying king to me entrusted,
As to the chancellor of the realm, his will,
His successor he nam'd him.

TANCRED.

Happy youth!
He then will triumph o'er his father's foes,
O'er haughty Osmond, and the tyrant's daughter.

SIFFREDI.

Ay, that is what I dread—that heat of youth;
There lurks, I fear, perdition to the state.
I dread the horrors of rekindled war:
Tho' dead, the tyrant still is to be fear'd;
His daughter's party still is strong, and numerous:
Her friend, earl Osmond, constable of Sicily,
Experienc'd, brave, high-born, of mighty interest.
Better the prince and princess should by marriage
Unite their friends, their interest and their claims;
Then will the peace and welfare of the land
On a firm basis rise.

TANCRED.

My lord Siffredi,
If by myself I of this prince may judge,
That scheme will scarce succeed—Your prudent age
In vain will counsel, if the heart forbid it—
But wherefore fear? The right is clearly his;
And, under your direction, with each man
Of worth, and stedfast loyalty, to back
At once the king's appointment and his birthright,
There is no ground for fear. They have great odds,
Against th' astonish'd sons of violence,
Who fight with awful justice on their side.
All Sicily will rouse, all faithful hearts
Will range themselves around prince Manfred's son.
For me, I here devote me to the service
Of this young prince; I every drop of blood
Will lose with joy, with transport in his cause—
Pardon my warmth—but that, my lord, will never
To this decision come—Then find the prince;
Lose not a moment to awaken in him
The royal soul. Perhaps he now desponding

Pines in a corner, and laments his fortune;
That in the narrower bounds of private life
He must confine his aims, those swelling virtues
Which from his noble father he inherits.

SIFFREDI.

Perhaps, regardless, in the common bane
Of youth he melts, in vanity and love.
But if the seeds of virtue glow within him,
I will awake a higher sense, a love
That grasps the loves and happiness of millions.

TANCRED.

Why that surmise? Or should he love, Siffredi,
I doubt not, it is nobly, which will raise
And animate his virtues—O permit me
To plead the cause of youth—Their virtue oft
In pleasure's soft enchantment lull'd a while
Forgets itself; it sleeps and gayly dreams,
Till great occasion rouse it: Then all flame,
It walks abroad, with heighten'd soul and vigour,
And by the change astonishes the world.
Even with a kind of sympathy, I feel
The joy that waits this prince; when all the powers,
Th' expanding heart can wish, of doing good;
Whatever swells ambition, or exalts
The human soul into divine emotions,
All crowd at once upon him.

SIFFREDI.

Ah, my Tancred,
Nothing so easy as in speculation,
And at a distance seen, the course of honour,
A fair delightful champain strew'd with flowers.
But when the practice comes; when our fond passions,

Pleasure, and pride, and self-indulgence, throw
Their magic dust around, the prospect roughens:
Then dreadful passes, craggy mountains rise,
Cliffs to be scal'd, and torrents to be stemm'd:
Then toil ensues, and perseverance stern;
And endless combats with our grosser sense,
Oft lost, and oft renew'd; and generous pain
For others felt; and, harder lesson still!
Our honest bliss for others sacrific'd;
And all the rugged task of virtue quails
The stoutest heart of common resolution.
Few get above this turbid scene of strife.
Few gain the summit, breathe that purest air,
That heavenly ether, which untroubled sees
The storm of vice and passion rage below.

TANCRED.

Most true, my lord. But why thus augur ill?
You seem to doubt this prince. I know him not.
Yet oh, methinks, my heart could answer for him!
The juncture is so high, so strong the gale
That blows from heaven, as thro' the deadest soul
Might breathe the godlike energy of virtue.

SIFFREDI.

Hear him, immortal shades of his great fathers!—
Forgive me, Sir, this trial of your heart:
Thou! Thou art he!

TANCRED.

Siffredi!

SIFFREDI.

Tancred, thou!
Thou art the man, of all the many thousands

That toil upon the bosom of this isle
By Heaven elected to command the rest,
To rule, protect them, and to make them happy!

TANCRED.

Manfred my father! I the last support
Of the fam'd Norman line, that awes the world!
I! who this morning wander'd forth an orphan,
Outcast of all but thee, my second father!
Thus call'd to glory! to the first great lot
Of human kind!—O wonder-working Hand
That, in majestic silence, sways at will
The mighty movements of unbounded nature;
O grant me, Heaven! the virtues to sustain
This awful burden of so many heroes!
Let me not be exalted into shame,
Set up the worthless pageant of vain grandeur.
Meantime I thank the justice of the king,
Who has my right bequeath'd me. Thee, Siffredi,
I thank thee—O I ne'er enough can thank thee!
Yes, thou hast been—thou art—shalt be my father!
Thou shalt direct my unexperienc'd years,
Shalt be the ruling head, and I the hand.

SIFFREDI.

It is enough for me—to see my sovereign
Assert his virtues, and maintain his honour.

TANCRED.

I think, my lord, you said the king committed
To you his will. I hope it is not clogg'd
With any base conditions, any clause,
To tyrannize my heart, and to Constantia
Enslave my hand devoted to another.
The hint you just now gave of that alliance,

You must imagine, wakes my fear. But know,
In this alone I will not bear dispute,
Not even from thee, Siffredi!—Let the council
Be strait assembled, and the will there open'd:
Thence issue speedy orders to convene,
This day ere noon, the senate: where those barons,
Who now are in Palermo, will attend,
To pay their ready homage to the king,
Their rightful king, who claims his native crown,
And will not be a king by deeds and parchments.

SIFFREDI.

I go, my liege. But once again permit me
To tell you——Now, now, is the trying crisis,
That must determine of your future reign.
O with heroic rigour watch your heart!
And to the sovereign duties of the king,
Th' unequal'd pleasures of a God on earth,
Submit the common joys, the common passions,
Nay, even the virtues of the private man.

TANCRED.

Of that no more. They not oppose, but aid,
Invigorate, cherish, and reward each other.
The kind all-ruling Wisdom is no tyrant.

SCENE V.

TANCRED *alone.*

Now, generous Sigismunda, comes my turn
To shew my love was not of thine unworthy,
When fortune bade me blush to look to thee.
But what is fortune to the wish of love?
A miserable bankrupt! O 'tis poor,

'Tis scanty all, whate'er we can bestow!
The wealth of kings is wretchedness and want!—
Quick, let me find her! taste that highest joy,
Th' exalted heart can know, the mixt effusion
Of gratitude and love!—Behold, she comes!

SCENE VI.

TANCRED, SIGISMUNDA.

TANCRED.

My fluttering soul was all on wing to find thee,
My love! my Sigismunda!

SIGISMUNDA.

O my Tancred!
Tell me, what means this mystery and gloom
That low'rs around? Just now, involv'd in thought,
My father shot athwart me—You, my lord,
Seem strangely mov'd—I fear some dark event
From the king's death to trouble our repose,
That tender calm we in the woods of Belmont
So happily enjoy'd——Explain this hurry,
What means it? Say.

TANCRED.

It means that we are happy!
Beyond our most romantic wishes happy!

SIGISMUNDA.

You but perplex me more.

TANCRED.

It means, my fairest!
That thou art queen of Sicily; and I
The happiest of mankind! than monarch more!

Because with thee I can adorn my throne.
Manfred, who fell by tyrant William's rage,
Fam'd Roger's lineal issue, was my father.
[*Pausing.*
You droop, my love; dejected on a sudden;
You seem to mourn my fortune—The soft tear
Springs in thy eye—O let me kiss it off——
Why this, my Sigismunda?

SIGISMUNDA.

Royal Tancred,
None at your glorious fortune can like me
Rejoice;—yet me alone, of all Sicilians,
It makes unhappy.

TANCRED.

I should hate it then!
Should throw, with scorn, the splendid ruin from me!—
No, Sigismunda, 'tis my hope with thee
To share it, whence it draws its richest value.

SIGISMUNDA.

You are my sovereign—I at humble distance——

TANCRED.

Thou art my queen! the sovereign of my soul!
You never reign'd with such triumphant lustre,
Such winning charms as now; yet, thou art still
The dear, the tender, generous Sigismunda!
Who, with a heart exalted far above
Those selfish views that charm the common breast,
Stoop'd from the height of life and courted beauty,
Then, then, to love me, when I seem'd of fortune
The hopeless outcast, when I had no friend,
None to protect and own me but thy father.
And would'st thou claim all goodness to thyself?
Canst thou thy Tancred deem so dully form'd,

Of such gross clay, just as I reach the point—
A point my wildest hopes could never image—
In that great moment, full of every virtue,
That I should then so mean a traitor prove
To the best bliss and honour of mankind,
So much disgrace the human heart, as then,
For the dead form of flattery and pomp,
The faithless joys of courts, to quit kind truth,
The cordial sweets of friendship and of love,
The life of life! my all, my Sigismunda!
I could upbraid thy fears, call them unkind,
Cruel, unjust, an outrage to my heart,
Did they not spring from love.

SIGISMUNDA.

Think not, my lord,
That to such vulgar doubts I can descend.
Your heart, I know, disdains the little thought
Of changing with the vain external change
Of circumstance and fortune. Rather thence
It would, with rising ardour, greatly feel
A noble pride to shew itself the same.
But, ah! the hearts of kings are not their own.
There is a haughty duty that subjects them
To chains of state, to wed the public welfare,
And not indulge the tender private virtues.
Some high-descended princess, who will bring
New power and interest to your throne, demands
Your royal hand—perhaps Constantia——

TANCRED.

She!
O name her not! Were I this moment free,
And disengag'd as he who never felt

The powerful eye of beauty, never sigh'd
For matchless worth like thine, I should abhor
All thoughts of that alliance. Her fell father
Most basely murder'd mine; and she, his daughter,
Supported by his barbarous party still,
His pride inherits, his imperious spirit,
And insolent pretensions to my throne.
And canst thou deem me then so poorly tame,
So cool a traitor to my father's blood,
As from the prudent cowardice of state
E'er to submit to such a base proposal?
Detested thought! O doubly, doubly hateful!
From the two strongest passions; from aversion
To this Constantia—and from love to thee.
Custom, 'tis true, a venerable tyrant,
O'er servile man extends her blind dominion:
The pride of kings enslaves them; their ambition,
Or interest, lords it o'er the better passions.
But vain their talk, mask'd under specious words
Of station, duty, and of public good:
They whom just Heaven has to a throne exalted,
To guard the rights and liberties of others,
What duty binds them to betray their own?
For me, my free-born heart shall bear no dictates,
But those of truth and honour; wear no chains,
But the dear chains of love and Sigismunda!
Or if indeed my choice must be directed
By views of public good, whom shall I chuse
So fit to grace, to dignify a crown,
And beam sweet mercy on a happy people,
As thee, my love? whom place upon my throne
But thee, descended from the good Siffredi!

'Tis fit that heart be thine, which drew from him
Whate'er can make it worthy thy acceptance.

SIGISMUNDA.

Cease, cease, to raise my hopes above my duty.
Charm me no more, my Tancred!—O that we
In those blest woods, where first you won my soul,
Had pass'd our gentle days: far from the toil
And pomp of courts! Such is the wish of love;
Of love, that, with delightful weakness, knows
No bliss and no ambition but itself.
But, in the world's full light, those charming dreams,
Those fond illusions vanish. Awful duties,
The tyranny of men, even your own heart,
Where lurks a sense your passion stifles now,
And proud imperious honour, call you from me.
'Tis all in vain—You cannot hush a voice
That murmurs here—I must not be persuaded!

TANCRED, *kneeling.*

Hear me, thou soul of all my hopes and wishes!
And witness, Heaven! prime source of love and joy!
Not a whole warring world combin'd against me;
Its pride, its splendor, its imposing forms,
Nor interest, nor ambition, nor the face
Of solemn state, not even thy father's wisdom,
Shall ever shake my faith to Sigismunda!

[*Trumpets and acclamations heard.*

But, hark! the public voice to duties calls me,
Which with unweary'd zeal I will discharge;
And thou, yes thou, shalt be my bright reward—
Yet—ere I go—to hush thy lovely fears,
Thy delicate objections—— [*writes his name.*
Take this blank,
Sign'd with my name, and give it to thy father:

Tell him, 'tis my command it be fill'd up
With a most strict and solemn marriage-contract.
How dear each tie! how charming to my soul!
That more unites me to my Sigismunda.

For thee and for my people's good to live,
Is all the bliss which sovereign power can give.

ACT II. SCENE I.

SIFFREDI, *alone.*

So far 'tis well—The late king's will proceeds
Upon the plan I counsel'd; that prince Tancred
Shall make Constantia partner of his throne.
O great, O wish'd event! whence the dire seeds
Of dark intestine broils, of civil war,
And all its dreadful miseries and crimes,
Shall be for ever rooted from the land.
May these dim eyes, long blasted by the rage
Of cruel faction and my country's woes,
Tir'd with the toils and vanities of life,
Behold this period, then be clos'd in peace!
But how this mighty obstacle surmount,
Which love has thrown betwixt? Love, that disturbs
The schemes of wisdom still; that, wing'd with passion,
Blind and impetuous in its fond pursuits,
Leaves the grey-headed reason far behind.
Alas! how frail the state of human bliss!
When even our honest passions oft destroy it.
I was to blame, in solitude and shades,
Infectious scenes! to trust their youthful hearts.
Would I had mark'd the rising flame! that now
Burns out with dangerous force—My daughter owns
Her passion for the king; she trembling own'd it,
With prayers and tears and tender supplications,
That almost shook my firmness—And this blank,
Which his rash fondness gave her, shews how much,
To what a wild extravagance he loves—
I see no means—it foils my deepest thought—

How to controul this madness of the king,
That wears the face of virtue, and will thence
Disdain restraint, will from his generous heart
Borrow new rage, even speciously oppose
To reason reason—But it must be done.
My own advice, of which I more and more
Approve, the strict conditions of the will,
Highly demand his marriage with Constantia;
Or else her party has a fair pretence——
And all, at once, is horror and confusion——
How issue from this maze?—The crowding barons,
Here summon'd to the palace, meet already,
To pay their homage, and confirm the will.
On a few moments hangs the public fate,
On a few hasty moments—Ha! there shone
A gleam of hope—Yes—with this very paper
I yet will save him—Necessary means
For good and noble ends can ne'er be wrong.
In that resistless, that peculiar case,
Deceit is truth and virtue—But how hold
This lion in the toil?—O I will form it
Of such a fatal thread, twist it so strong
With all the ties of honour and of duty,
That his most desperate fury shall not break
The honest snare—Here is the royal hand—
I will beneath it write a perfect, full,
And absolute agreement to the will;
Which read before the nobles of the realm
Assembled, in the sacred face of Sicily,
Constantia present, every heart and eye
Fix'd on their monarch, every tongue applauding,
He must submit, his dream of love must vanish—
It shall be done!——To me, I know, 'tis ruin;
But safety to the public, to the king.

I will not reason more, I will not listen
Even to the voice of honour—No—'tis fix'd!
I here devote me for my prince and country;
Let them be safe, and let me nobly perish!
Behold earl Osmond comes; without whose aid
My schemes are all in vain.

SCENE II.

OSMOND, SIFFREDI.

OSMOND.

My lord Siffredi,
I from the council hasten'd to Constantia,
And have accomplish'd what we there propos'd.
The princess to the will submits her claims.
She with her presence means to grace the senate,
And of your royal charge young Tancred's hand
Accept. At first, indeed, it shock'd her hopes
Of reigning sole, this new surprizing scene
Of Manfred's son, appointed by the king
With her joint heir——But I so fully shew'd
The justice of the case, the public good
And sure establish'd peace which thence would rise,
Join'd to the strong necessity that urg'd her,
If on Sicilia's throne she meant to sit,
As to the wise disposal of the will
Her high ambition tam'd. Methought, besides,
I could discern that not from prudence merely
She to this choice submitted.

SIFFREDI.

Noble Osmond,
You have in this done to the public great

And signal service. Yes, I must avow it;
This frank and ready instance of your zeal,
In such a trying crisis of the state,
When interest and ambition might have warp'd
Your views; I own, this truly generous virtue
Upbraids the rashness of my former judgment.

OSMOND.

Siffredi, no.—To you belongs the praise;
The glorious work is yours. Had I not seiz'd,
Improv'd the wish'd occasion to root out
Division from the land, and save my country,
I had been base, been infamous for ever.
'Tis you, my lord, to whom the many thousands,
That by the barbarous sword of civil war
Had fallen inglorious, owe their lives; to you
The sons of this fair isle, from her first peers
Down to the swain who tills her golden plains,
Owe their safe homes, their soft domestic hours,
And thro' late time posterity shall bless you,
You who advis'd this will—I blush to think
I have so long oppos'd the best good man
In Sicily——with what impartial care
Ought we to watch o'er prejudice and passion,
Nor trust too much the jaundic'd eye of party!
Henceforth its vain delusions I renounce,
Its hot determinations, that confine
All merit and all virtue to itself.
To yours I join my hand; with you will own
No interest and no party but my country.
Nor is your friendship only my ambition:
There is a dearer name, the name of father,
By which I should rejoice to call Siffredi.
Your daughter's hand would to the public weal
Unite my private happiness.

SIFFREDI.

My lord,
You have my glad consent. To be allied
To your distinguish'd family, and merit,
I shall esteem an honour. From my soul
I here embrace earl Osmond as my friend,
And son.

OSMOND.

You make him happy. This assent,
So frank and warm, to what I long have wish'd,
Engages all my gratitude; at once,
In the first blossom, it matures our friendship.
I from this moment vow myself the friend
And zealous servant of Siffredi's house.

Enter an OFFICER *belonging to the Court.*

OFFICER *to* SIFFREDI.

The king, my lord, demands your speedy presence.

SIFFREDI.

I will attend him strait—Farewel, my lord:
The senate meets: there, a few moments hence,
I will rejoin you.

OSMOND.

There, my noble lord,
We will complete this salutary work,
Will there begin a new auspicious æra.

SCENE III.

OSMOND *alone.*

Siffredi gives his daughter to my wishes—
But does she give herself? Gay, young, and flatter'd,
Perhaps engag'd, will she her youthful heart
Yield to my harsher uncomplying years?
I am not form'd by flattery and praise,
By sighs and tears, and all the whining trade
Of love, to feed a fair one's vanity;
To charm at once and spoil her. These soft arts
Nor suit my years nor temper; these be left
To boys and doating age. A prudent father,
By nature charg'd to guide and rule her choice,
Resigns his daughter to a husband's power,
Who with superior dignity, with reason,
And manly tenderness will ever love her;
Not first a kneeling slave, and then a tyrant.

SCENE IV.

OSMOND, BARONS.

OSMOND.

My lords, I greet you well. This wondrous day
Unites us all in amity and friendship.
We meet to-day with open hearts, and looks
Not gloom'd by party scouling on each other,
But all the children of one happy isle,
The social sons of liberty. No pride,
No passion now, no thwarting views divide us:

Prince Manfred's line, at last, to William's join'd,
Combines us in one family of brothers.
This to the late good king's well-order'd will,
And wise Siffredi's generous care, we owe.
I truly give you joy. First of you all,
I here renounce those errors and diviſions
That have so long disturb'd our peace, and seem'd,
Fermenting still, to threaten new commotions—
By time instructed let us not disdain
To quit mistakes. We all, my lords, have err'd.
Men may, I find, be honest, tho' they differ.

FIRST BARON.

Who follows not, my lord, the fair example
You set us all, whate'er be his pretence,
Loves not with single and unbias'd heart
His country as he ought.

SECOND BARON.

O beauteous Peace!
Sweet union of a state! What else, but thou,
Gives safety, strength, and glory to a people!
I bow, lord constable, beneath the snow
Of many years; yet in my breast revives
A youthful flame. Methinks, I see again
Those gentle days renew'd, that bless'd our isle,
Ere by this wasteful fury of division,
Worse than our Ætna's most destructive fires,
It desolated sunk. I see our plains
Unbounded waving with the gifts of harvest;
Our seas with commerce throng'd, our busy ports
With chearful toil. Our Enna blooms afresh;
Afresh the sweets of thymy Hybla flow.
Our nymphs and shepherds, sporting in each vale,
Inspire new song, and wake the pastoral reed—

The tongue of age is fond—Come, come, my sons;
I long to see this prince, of whom the world
Speaks largely well—His father was my friend,
The brave unhappy Manfred—Come, my lords;
We tarry here too long.

SCENE V.

Two OFFICERS *keeping off the Crowd.*

One of the Crowd.

Shew us our king,
The valiant Manfred's son, who lov'd the people—
We must, we will behold him—Give us way.

FIRST OFFICER.

Pray, gentlemen, give back—it must not be—
Give back, I pray—on such a glad occasion
I would not ill entreat the lowest of you.

SECOND MAN *of the Crowd.*

Nay, give us but a glimpse of our young king.
We more than any baron of them all
Will pay him true allegiance.

SECOND OFFICER.

Friends—indeed—
You cannot pass this way—We have strict orders,
To keep for him himself, and for the barons,
All these apartments clear—Go to the gate
That fronts the sea—You there will find admission.

ALL.

Long live king Tancred! Manfred's son—Huzza!

[*Crowd goe off.*

FIRST OFFICER.

I do not marvel at their rage of joy:
He is a brave and amiable prince.
When in my lord Siffredi's house I liv'd,
Ere by his favour I obtain'd this office,
I there remember well the young count Tancred.
To see him and to love him were the same.
He was so noble in his ways, yet still
So affable and mild—Well, well, old Sicily,
Yet happy days await thee!

SECOND OFFICER.

Grant it, Heaven!
We have seen sad and troublous times enough.
He is they say, to wed the late king's sister,
Constantia.

FIRST OFFICER.

Friend, of that I greatly doubt.
Or I mistake, or lord Siffredi's daughter,
The gentle Sigismunda has his heart.
If one may judge by kindly cordial looks,
And fond assiduous care to please each other,
Most certainly they love——O be they blest,
As they deserve! It were great pity aught
Should part a matchless pair: the glory he,
And she the blooming grace of Sicily!

SECOND OFFICER.

My lord Rodolpho comes.

SCENE VI.

RODOLPHO, *from the Senate.*

RODOLPHO.

My honest friends,
You may retire. [Officers *go out.*
A storm is in the wind.
This Will perplexes all. No, Tancred never
Can ſtoop to these conditions, which at once
Attack his rights, his honour, and his love.
Those wise old men, those plodding grave state pedants,
Forget the course of youth; their crooked prudence,
To baseness verging still, forgets to take
Into their fine-spun schemes the generous heart,
That thro' the cobweb system bursting lays
Their labours waste—So will this business prove,
Or I mistake the king—back from the pomp
He seem'd at first to shrink; and round his brow
I mark'd a gathering cloud, when by his side,
As if design'd to share the public homage,
He saw the tyrant's daughter. But confess'd,
At least to me, the doubling tempeſt frown'd,
And shook his swelling bosom, when he heard
Th' unjuſt, the base conditions of the will.
Uncertain, tost in cruel agitation,
He oft, methought, address'd himself to speak
And interrupt Siffredi; who appear'd,
With conscious haste, to dread that interruption,
And hurry'd on—But hark! I hear a noise,
As if th' assembly rose—Ha! Sigismunda,

Oppress'd with grief and wrapt in pensive sorrow,
Passes along——

[Sigismunda *and Attendants pass thro' the back scene.* Laura *advances.*

SCENE VII.

RODOLPHO, LAURA.

LAURA.

Your high-prais'd friend, the king,
Is false, most vilely false! The meanest slave
Had shown a nobler heart; nor grossly thus,
By the first bait ambition spread, been gull'd.
He Manfred's son! away! it cannot be!
The son of that brave prince could ne'er betray
Those rights so long usurp'd from his great fathers,
Which he, this day, by such amazing fortune,
Had just regain'd; he ne'er could sacrifice
All faith, all honour, gratitude, and love,
Even just resentment of his father's fate,
And pride itself, whate'er exalts a man
Above the groveling sons of peasant-mud,
All in a moment—And for what? why truly,
For kind permission, gracious leave, to sit
On his own throne with tyrant William's daughter!

RODOLPHO.

I stand amaz'd—You surely wrong him, Laura.
There must be some mistake.

LAURA.

There can be none!
Siffredi read his full and free consent
Before th' applauding senate. True indeed,

A small remain of shame, a timorous weakness,
Even dastardly in falsehood, made him blush
To act this scene in Sigismunda's eye,
Who sunk beneath his perfidy and baseness.
Hence, till to-morrow he adjourn'd the senate—
To-morrow fix'd with infamy to crown him!
Then, leading off his gay triumphant princess,
He left the poor unhappy Sigismunda,
To bend her trembling steps to that sad home
His faithless vows will render hateful to her—
He comes—Farewel—I cannot bear his presence!

SCENE VIII.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI, RODODPHO.

TANCRED, *entering to* SIFFREDI.

Avoid me hoary traitor!—Go, Rodolpho,
Give orders that all passages this way
Be shut—Defend me from a hateful world,
The bane of peace and honour—then return—
What! dost thou haunt me still? O monstrous insult!
Unparallel'd indignity! Just Heaven!
Was ever king, was ever man so treated!
So trampled into baseness!

SIFFREDI.

Here, my liege,
Here strike! I nor deserve nor ask for mercy.

TANCRED.

Distraction!—O my soul—Hold, reason, hold
Thy giddy seat—O this inhuman outrage
Unhinges thought!

SIFFREDI.

Exterminate thy servant!

TANCRED.

All, all but this I could have borne—but this!
This daring insolence beyond example!
This murderous stroke that stabs my peace for ever!
That wounds me there—there! where the human heart
Most exquisitely feels——

SIFFREDI.

O bear it not,
My royal lord! appease on me your vengeance!

TANCRED.

Did ever tyrant image aught so cruel!
The lowest slave that crawls upon the earth,
Robb'd of each comfort Heaven bestows on mortals,
On the bare ground, has still his virtue left,
The sacred treasures of an honest heart,
Which thou hast dar'd, with rash audacious hand,
And impious fraud, in me to violate——

SIFFREDI.

Behold, my liege, that rash audacious hand,
Which not repents its crime——O glorious! happy!
If by my ruin I can save your honour.

TANCRED.

Such honour I renounce! with sovereign scorn
Greatly detest it, and its mean adviser!
Hast thou not dar'd beneath my name to shelter—
My name for other purposes design'd,
Given from the fondness of a faithful heart,
With the best love o'erflowing—hast thou not
Beneath thy sovereign's name basely presum'd
To shield a lye? a lye! in public utter'd,

To all deluded Sicily? But know,
This poor contrivance is as weak as base.
In such a wretched toil none can be held
But fools and cowards—Soon thy flimsy arts,
Touch'd by my just my burning indignation,
Shall burst like threads in flame!—Thy doating prudence
But more secures the purpose it would shake.
Had my resolves been wavering and doubtful,
This would confirm them, make them fix'd as fate;
This adds the only motive that was wanting
To urge them on thro' war and desolation—
What! marry her! Constantia! Her! the daughter
Of the fell tyrant who destroy'd my father!
The very thought is madness! Ere thou seest
The torch of Hymen light these hated nuptials,
Thou shalt behold Sicilia wrapt in flames,
Her cities raz'd, her valleys drench'd with slaughter—
Love set aside—my pride assumes the quarrel.
My honour now is up; in spite of thee,
A world combin'd against me, I will give
This scatter'd Will in fragments to the winds,
Assert my rights, the freedom of my heart,
Crush all who dare oppose me to the dust,
And heap perdition on thee!

SIFFREDI.

Sir, 'tis just.
Exhaust on me your rage; I claim it all.
But for these public threats thy passion utters,
'Tis what thou canst not do!

TANCRED.

I cannot! ha!
Driven to the dreadful brink of such dishonour
Enough to make the tamest coward brave,

And into fierceness rouse the mildest nature,
What shall arrest my vengeance? who?

SIFFREDI.

Thyself!

TANCRED.

Away! dare not to justify thy crime!
That, that alone can aggravate its horror,
Add insolence to insolence—perhaps
May make my rage forget!——

SIFFREDI.

O let it burst
On this grey head devoted to thy service!
But when the storm has vented all its fury,
Thou then must hear—nay more, I know, thou wilt—
Wilt hear the calm, yet stronger voice of reason.
Thou must reflect that a whole peoples safety,
The weal of trusted millions should bear down,
Thyself the judge, thy fondest partial pleasure.
Thou must reflect that there are other duties,
A nobler pride, a more exalted honour,
Superior pleasures far, that will oblige,
Compel thee, to abide by this my deed,
Unwarranted perhaps in common justice,
But which Necessity, even Virtue's tyrant,
With awful voice commanded—Yes, thou must,
In calmer hours, divest thee of thy love,
These common passions of the vulgar breast,
This boiling heat of youth, and be a king!
The lover of thy people!

TANCRED.

Truths ill-employ'd!
Abus'd to colour guilt!—a king! a king!
Yes, I will be a king, but not a slave!

In this will be a king! in this my people
Shall learn to judge how I will guard their rights,
When they behold me vindicate my own.
But have I, say, been treated like a king?——
Heavens! could I stoop to such outrageous usage,
I were a mean, a shameless wretch, unworthy
To wield a sceptre in a land of slaves,
A soil abhorr'd of virtue should belye
My father's blood, belye those very maxims,
At other times, you taught my youth—Siffredi!

[*In a soften'd tone of voice.*

SIFFREDI.

Behold, my prince, behold thy poor old servant,
Whose darling care, these twenty years, has been
To nurse thee up to virtue; who for thee,
Thy glory and thy weal, renounces all,
All interest or ambition can pour forth;
What many a selfish father would pursue
Thro' treachery and crimes: behold him here,
Bent on his feeble knees, to beg, conjure thee,
With tears to beg thee, to controul thy passion,
And save thyself, thy honour, and thy people!
Kneeling with me behold the many thousands
To thy protection trusted: Fathers, mothers,
The sacred front of venerable age,
The tender virgin and the helpless infant;
The ministers of Heaven, those, who maintain,
Around thy throne, the majesty of rule;
And those, whose labour, scorch'd by winds and sun,
Feeds the rejoicing public: see them all,
Here at thy feet, conjuring thee to save them,
From misery and war, from crimes and rapine!
Can there be aught, kind Heaven! in self-indulgence
To weigh down these? This aggregate of love,

With which compar'd the dearest private passion
Is but the wafted dust upon the balance?
Turn not away—Oh is there not some part,
In thy great heart so sensible to kindness,
And generous warmth, some nobler part, to feel
The prayers and tears of these, the mingled voice
Of Heaven and earth!

TANCRED.

There is! and thou hast touch'd it.
Rise, rise, Siffredi—Oh! thou hast undone me,
Unkind old man!—O ill-entreated Tancred!
Which way soe'er I turn, dishonour rears
Her hideous front—and misery and ruin!
Was it for this you took such care to form me?
For this imbued me with the quickest sense
Of shame; those finer feelings, that ne'er vex
The common mass of mortals, dully happy
In blest insensibility? O rather
You should have sear'd my heart; taught me that power
And splendid interest lord it still o'er virtue;
That, gilded by prosperity and pride,
There is no shame, no meanness; temper'd thus,
I had been fit to rule a venal world.
Alas! what meant thy wantonness of prudence?
Why have you rais'd this miserable conflict
Betwixt the duties of the king and man?
Set virtue against virtue?—Ah Siffredi!
'Tis thy superfluous, thy unfeeling wisdom,
That has involv'd me in a maze of error,
Almost beyond retreat—But hold, my soul,
Thy steady purpose—Tost by various passions,
To this eternal anchor keep—There is,
Can be no public without private virtue——
Then mark me well, observe what I command;

It is the sole expedient now remaining—
To-morrow, when the senate meets again,
Unfold the whole, unravel the deceit;
Nor that alone, try to repair its mischief;
There all thy power, thy eloquence and interest
Exert, to reinstate me in my rights,
And from thy own dark snares to disembroil me—
Start not, my lord—This must and shall be done!
Or here, our friendship ends—Howe'er disguis'd,
Whatever thy pretence, thou art a traitor.

SIFFREDI.

I should indeed deserve the name of traitor,
And even a traitor's fate, had I so slightly,
From principles so weak, done what I did,
As e'er to disavow it——

TANCRED.

Ha!

SIFFREDI.

My liege,
Expect not this—Tho' practis'd long in courts,
I have not so far learn'd their subtle trade,
To veer obedient with each gust of passion.
I honour thee, I venerate thy orders,
But honour more my duty. Nought on earth
Shall ever shake me from that solid rock,
Nor smiles nor frowns.——

TANCRED.

You will not then?

SIFFREDI.

I cannot!

TANCRED.

Away! begone!—O my Rodolpho, come,
And save me from this traitor!—Hence, I say.
Avoid my presence strait! and know, old man,
Thou my worst foe beneath the mask of friendship,
Who, not content to trample in the dust
My dearest rights, dost with cool insolence
Persist, and call it duty; hadst thou not
A daughter that protects thee, thou shouldst feel
The vengeance thou deservest—No reply!
Away!

SCENE IX.

TANCRED, RODOLPHO.

RODOLPHO.

What can incense my prince so highly
Against his friend Siffredi?

TANCRED.

Friend! Rodolpho?
When I have told thee what this friend has done,
How play'd me like a boy, a base-born wretch,
Who had nor heart nor spirit! thou wilt stand
Amaz'd, and wonder at my stupid patience.

RODOLPHO.

I heard, with mixt astonishment and grief,
The king's unjust dishonourable will,
Void in itself—I saw you stung with rage,
And writhing in the snare; Just as I went,
At your command, to wait you here—but that
Was the king's deed, not his.

TANCRED.

O he advis'd it!
These many years he has in secret hatch'd
This black contrivance, glories in the scheme,
And proudly plumes him with his traiterous virtue.
But that was nought, Rodolpho, nothing, nothing!
O that was gentle, blameless to what follow'd!
I had, my friend, to Sigismunda given,
To hush her fears, in the full gush of fondness,
A blank sign'd by my hand—and he, O Heavens!
Was ever such a wild attempt!—he wrote
Beneath my name an absolute compliance
To this detested Will; nay, dar'd to read it
Before myself, on my insulted throne
His idle pageant plac'd—O words are weak
To paint the pangs, the rage, the indignation,
That whirl'd from thought to thought my soul in tempest,
Now on the point to burst, and now by shame
Repress'd—But in the face of Sicily,
All mad with acclamation, what, Rodolpho,
What could I do? The sole relief that rose
To my distracted mind, was to adjourn
Th' assembly till to-morrow—But to-morrow
What can be done?—O it avails not what!
I care not what is done—My only care
Is how to clear my faith to Sigismunda.
She thinks me false! She cast a look that kill'd me!
O I am base in Sigismunda's eye!
The lowest of mankind, the most perfidious!

RODOLPHO.

This was a strain of insolence indeed,
A daring outrage of so strange a nature,
As stuns me quite——

TANCRED.

Curs'd be my timid prudence!
That dash'd not back, that moment in his face,
The bold presumptuous lye—and curs'd this hand!
That from a start of poor dissimulation,
Led off my Sigismunda's hated rival.
Ah then! what, poiſon'd by the false appearance,
What, Sigismunda, were thy thoughts of me!
How, in the silent bitterness of soul,
How didst thou scorn me! hate mankind, thyself,
For trusting to the vows of faithless Tancred!
For such I seem'd—I was!—The thought distracts me!
I should have cast a flattering world aside,
Rush'd from my throne, before them all avow'd her,
The choice, the glory of my free-born heart,
And spurn'd the shameful fetters thrown upon it—
Instead of that—confusion!——what I did
Has clinch'd the chain, confirm'd Siffredi's crime,
And fix'd me down to infamy!

RODOLPHO.

My lord,
Blame not the conduct, which your situation
Tore from your tortur'd heart—What could you do?
Had you, so circumstanc'd, in open senate,
Before th' astonish'd public, with no friends
Prepar'd, no party form'd, affronted thus
The haughty princess and her powerful faction,
Supported by this Will, the sudden stroke,
Abrupt and premature, might have recoil'd
Upon yourself, even your own friends revolted,
And turn'd at once the public scale against you.
Besides, consider, had you then detected
In its fresh guilt this action of Siffredi,

You must with signal vengeance have chastis'd
The treasonable deed—Nothing so mean
As weak insulted power that dares not punish.
And how would that have suited with your love?
His daughter present too? Trust me, your conduct,
Howe'er abhorrent to a heart like yours,
Was fortunate and wise—Not that I mean
E'er to advise submission——

TANCRED.

Heavens! Submission!
Could I descend to bear it, even in thought,
Despise me, you, the world, and Sigismunda!
Submission!—No!—To-morrow's glorious light
Shall flash discovery on the scene of baseness.
Whatever be the risque, by Heavens! to-morrow,
I will o'erturn the dirty lye-built schemes
Of these old men, and shew my faithful senate,
That Manfred's son knows to assert and wear,
With undiminish'd dignity, that crown
This unexpected day has plac'd upon him.
But this, my friend, these stormy gusts of pride,
Are foreign to my love—Till Sigismunda
Be disabus'd, my breast is tumult all,
And can obey no settled course of reason.
I see her still, I feel her powerful image,
That look, where with reproach complaint was mix'd,
Big with soft woe and gentle indignation,
Which seem'd at once to pity and to scorn me—
O let me find her! I too long have left
My Sigismunda to converse with tears,
A prey to thoughts that picture me a villain.
But, ah! how, clogg'd with this accursed state,
A tedious world, shall I now find access?

Her father too—Ten thousand horrors crowd
Into the wild fantastic eye of love——
Who knows what he may do? Come then, my friend,
And by thy sister's hand O let me steal
A letter to her bosom—I no longer
Can bear her absence, by the just contempt
She now must brand me with, inflam'd to madness.
Fly, my Rodolpho, fly! engage thy sister
To aid my letter, and this very evening
Secure an interview—I would not bear
This rack another day, not for my kingdom!
Till then, deep-plung'd in solitude and shades,
I will not see the hated face of man.

Thought drives on thought, on passions passions roll;
Her smiles alone can calm my raging soul.

ACT III. SCENE I.

SIGISMUNDA *alone, sitting in a disconsolate posture.*

Ah tyrant prince! ah more than faithless Tancred!
Ungenerous and inhuman in thy falsehood!
Hadst thou, this morning, when my hopeless heart,
Submissive to my fortune and my duty,
Had so much spirit left, as to be willing
To give thee back thy vows, ah! hadst thou then
Confess'd the sad necessity thy state
Impos'd upon thee, and with gentle friendship,
Since we must part at last, our parting soften'd;
I should indeed—I should have been unhappy,
But not to this extreme—Amidst my grief,
I had, with pensive pleasure, cherish'd still
The sweet remembrance of thy former love,
Thy image still had dwelt upon my soul,
And made our guiltless woes not undelightful.
But coolly thus—How couldst thou be so cruel?
Thus to revive my hopes, to soothe my love
And call forth all its tenderness, then sink me
In black despair—What unrelenting pride
Possess'd thy breast, that thou couldst bear unmov'd
To see me bent beneath a weight of shame?
Pangs thou canst never feel! how couldst thou drag me
In barbarous triumph at a rival's car?
How make me witness to a sight of horror?
That hand, which, but a few short hours ago,
So wantonly abus'd my simple faith,
Before th' attesting world given to another,
Irrevocably given!—There was a time,

When the least cloud that hung upon my brow,
Perhaps imagin'd only, touch'd thy pity.
Then, brighten'd often by the ready tear,
Thy looks were softness all; then the quick heart,
In every nerve alive forgot itself,
And for each other then we felt alone.
But now, alas! those tender days are fled;
Now thou canst see me wretched, pierc'd with anguish,
With studied anguish of thy own creating,
Nor wet thy harden'd eye—Hold, let me think—
I wrong thee sure; thou canst not be so base,
As meanly in my misery to triumph——
What is it then?—Why should I search for pain?—
O, 'tis as bad!—'Tis fickleness of nature,
'Tis sickly love extinguish'd by ambition——
Is there, kind heaven! no constancy in man?
No stedfast truth, no generous fix'd affection,
That can bear up against a selfish world?
No, there is none—Even Tancred is inconstant!

[*Rising.*

Hence! let me fly this scene!—Whate'er I see,
These roofs, these walls, each object that surrounds me,
Are tainted with his vows—But whither fly?
The groves are worse, the soft retreat of Belmont,
Its deepening glooms, gay lawns, and airy summits,
Will wound my busy memory to torture,
And all its shades will whisper—faithless Tancred!—
My father comes—How, sunk in this disorder,
Shall I sustain his presence?

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI, SIGISMUNDA.

SIFFREDI.

Sigismunda,
My dearest child! I grieve to find thee thus
A prey to tears. I know the powerful cause
From which they flow, and therefore can excuse them,
But not their wilful obstinate continuance.
Come, rouse thee, then, call up thy drooping spirit,
Come, wake to reason from this dream of love,
And shew the world thou art Siffredi's daughter.

SIGISMUNDA.

Alas! I am unworthy of that name.

SIFFREDI.

Thou art indeed to blame; thou hast too rashly
Engag'd thy heart, without a father's sanction.
But this I can forgive. The king has virtues,
That plead thy full excuse; nor was I void
Of blame, to trust thee to those dangerous virtues.
Then dread not my reproaches. Tho' he blames,
Thy tender father pities more than blames thee.
Thou art my daughter still; and if thy heart
Will now resume its pride, assert itself,
And greatly rise superior to this trial,
I to my warmest confidence again
Will take thee, and esteem thee more my daughter.

SIGISMUNDA.

O you are gentler far than I deserve!
It is, it ever was my darling pride,

To bend my soul to your supreme commands,
Your wisest will; and tho' by love betray'd—
Alas! and punish'd too—I have transgress'd
The nicest bounds of duty, yet I feel
A sentiment of tenderness, a source
Of filial nature springing in my breast,
That should it kill me, shall controul this passion,
And make me all submission and obedience
To you my honour'd lord, the best of fathers.

SIFFREDI.

Come to my arms, thou comfort of my age!
Thou only joy and hope of these grey hairs!
Come! let me take thee to a parent's heart;
There with the kindly aid of my advice,
Even with the dew of these paternal tears,
Revive and nourish this becoming spirit——
Then thou dost promise me, my Sigismunda—
Thy father stoops to make it his request—
Thou wilt resign thy fond presumptuous hopes,
And henceforth never more indulge one thought
That in the light of love regards the king?

SIGISMUNDA.

Hopes I have none!—Those by this fatal day
Are blasted all—But from my soul to banish,
While weeping memory there retains her seat,
Thoughts which the purest bosom might have cherish'd,
Once my delight, now even in anguish charming,
Is more, alas! my lord, than I can promise.

SIFFREDI.

Absence and time, the softener of our passions,
Will conquer this. Mean time, I hope from thee
A generous great effort; that thou wilt now
Exert thy utmost force, nor languish thus

Beneath the vain extravagance of love.
Let not thy father blush to hear it said,
His daughter was so weak, e'er to admit
A thought so void of reason, that a king
Should to his rank, his honour, and his glory,
The high important duties of a throne,
Even to his throne itself madly prefer
A wild romantic passion, the fond child
Of youthful dreaming thought and vacant hours;
That he should quit his heaven-appointed station,
Desert his awful charge, the care of all
The toiling millions which this isle contains;
Nay more, should plunge them into war and ruin:
And all to soothe a sick imagination,
A miserable weakness—Must for thee,
To make thee blest, Sicilia be unhappy?
The king himself, lost to the nobler sense
Of manly praise, become the piteous hero
Of some soft tale, and rush on sure destruction?
Canst thou, my daughter, let the monstrous thought
Possess one moment thy perverted fancy?
Rouse thee, for shame! and if a spark of virtue
Lies slumbering in thy soul, bid it blaze forth;
Nor sink unequal to the glorious lesson,
This day thy lover gave thee from his throne.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah! that was not from virtue!—Had, my father,
That been his aim, I yield to what you say;
'Tis powerful truth, unanswerable reason.
Then, then, with sad but duteous resignation,
I had submitted as became your daughter;
But in that moment, when my humbled hopes
Were to my duty reconcil'd, to raise them

To yet a fonder height than e'er they knew,
Then rudely dash them down—There is the sting!
The blasting view is ever present to me——
Why did you drag me to a sight so cruel?

SIFFREDI.

It was a scene to fire thy emulation.

SIGISMUNDA.

It was a scene of perfidy!—But know,
I will do more than imitate the king—
For he is false!—I, tho' sincerely pierc'd
With the best, truest passion, ever touch'd
A virgin's breast, here vow to Heaven and you,
Tho' from my heart I cannot, from my hopes
To cast this prince—What would you more, my father?

SIFFREDI.

Yes, one thing more—thy father then is happy—
Tho' by the voice of innocence and virtue
Absolv'd, we live not to ourselves alone:
A rigorous world, with peremptory sway,
Subjects us all, and even the noblest most.
This world from thee, my honour and thy own,
Demands one step; a step, by which convinc'd
The king may see thy heart disdains to wear
A chain which his has greatly thrown aside.
'Tis fitting too, thy sex's pride commands thee,
To shew th' approving world thou canst resign,
As well as he, nor with inferior spirit,
A passion fatal to the public weal.
But above all, thou must root out for ever
From the king's breast the least remain of hope,
And henceforth make his mention'd love dishonour.
These things, my daughter, that must needs be done,

Can but this way be done—by the safe refuge,
The sacred shelter of a husband's arms.
And there is one—

SIGISMUNDA.

Good Heavens! what means my lord?

SIFFREDI.

One of illustrious family, high rank,
Yet still of higher dignity and merit,
Who can and will protect thee; one to awe
The king himself—Nay, hear me, Sigismunda—
The noble Osmond courts thee for his bride,
And has my plighted word—This day—

SIGISMUNDA *kneeling.*

My father!
Let me with trembling arms embrace thy knees!
O if you ever wish to see me happy;
If e'er in infant years I gave you joy,
When, as I prattling twin'd around your neck,
You snatch'd me to your bosom, kiss'd my eyes,
And melting said you saw my mother there;
O save me from that worst severity
Of fate! O outrage not my breaking heart
To that degree!—I cannot! 'tis impossible!—
So soon withdraw it, give it to another—
Hear me, my dearest father! hear the voice
Of nature and humanity, that plead
As well as justice for me!—Not to chuse
Without your wise direction may be duty;
But still my choice is free—That is a right,
Which even the lowest slave can never lose.
And would you thus degrade me? make me base?
For such it were to give my worthless person
Without my heart, an injury to Osmond,

The highest can be done—Let me, my lord—
Or I shall die, shall by the sudden change
Be to distraction shock'd—Let me wear out
My hapless days in solitude and silence,
Far from the malice of a prying world!
At least—you cannot sure refuse me this——
Give me a little time—I will do all,
All I can do, to please you!—O your eye
Sheds a kind beam——

SIFFREDI.

My daughter! you abuse
The softness of my nature—

SIGISMUNDA.

Here, my father,
Till you relent, here will I grow for ever!

SIFFREDI.

Rise, Sigismunda.—Tho' you touch my heart,
Nothing can shake th' inexorable dictates
Of honour, duty, and determin'd reason.
Then by the holy ties of filial love,
Resolve, I charge thee, to receive earl Osmond,
As suits the man who is thy father's choice,
And worthy of thy hand—I go to bring him—

SIGISMUNDA.

Spare me, my dearest father!

SIFFREDI, *aside.*

I must rush
From her soft grasp, or nature will betray me!
O grant us, Heaven! that fortitude of mind,
Which listens to our duty, not our passions—
Quit me, my child!

SIGISMUNDA.

You cannot, O my father!
You cannot leave me thus!

SIFFREDI.

Come hither, Laura,
Come to thy friend. Now shew thyself a friend.
Combat her weakness; dissipate her tears;
Cherish and reconcile her to her duty.

SCENE III.

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA.

O woe on woe! distrest by love and duty!
O every way unhappy Sigismunda!

LAURA,

Forgive me, Madam, if I blame your grief.
How can you waste your tears on one so false?
Unworthy of your tenderness? to whom
Nought but contempt is due and indignation?

SIGISMUNDA.

You know not half the horrors of my fate!
I might perhaps have learn'd to scorn his falsehood;
Nay, when the first sad burst of tears was past,
I might have rous'd my pride and scorn'd himself—
But 'tis too much, this greatest last misfortune—
O whither shall I fly? Where hide me, Laura,
From the dire scene my father now prepares?

LAURA.

What thus alarms you, Madam?

SIGISMUNDA.

Can it be?
Can I——ah no!——at once give to another
My violated heart? in one wild moment?
He brings earl Osmond to receive my vows!
O dreadful change! for Tancred haughty Osmond!

LAURA.

Now, on my soul, 'tis what an outrag'd heart
Like yours, should wish!—I should, by Heavens,
esteem it
Most exquisite revenge!.

SIGISMUNDA.

Revenge on whom?
On my own heart, already but too wretched!

LAURA.

On him! this Tancred! who has basely sold,
For the dull form of despicable grandeur,
His faith, his love!—At once a slave and tyrant!

SIGISMUNDA.

O rail at me, at my believing folly,
My vain ill-founded hopes, but spare him, Laura!

LAURA.

Who rais'd those hopes? who triumphs o'er that weakness?
Pardon the word—You greatly merit him;
Better than him, with all his giddy pomp!
You rais'd him by your smiles when he was nothing!
Where is your woman's pride? that guardian spirit
Given us to dash the perfidy of man?
Ye Powers! I cannot bear the thought with patience—
Yet recent from the most unsparing vows

The tongue of love e'er lavish'd; from your hopes
So vainly, idly, cruelly deluded;
Before the public thus, before your father,
By an irrevocable solemn deed,
With such inhuman scorn, to throw you from him!
To give his faithless hand yet warm from thine,
With complicated meanness, to Constantia!
And to complete his crime, when thy weak limbs
Could scarce support thee, then, of thee regardless,
To lead her off!

SIGISMUNDA.

That was indeed a sight
To poison love! to turn it into rage
And keen contempt!—What means this stupid weakness
That hangs upon me? Hence unworthy tears!
Disgrace my cheek no more! No more, my heart,
For one so coolly false or meanly fickle——
O it imports not which—dare to suggest
The least excuse!—Yes, traitor, I will wring
Thy pride, will turn thy triumph to confusion!
I will not pine away my days for thee,
Sighing to brooks and groves; while, with vain pity,
You in a rival's arms lament my fate——
No! let me perish! ere I tamely be
That soft, that patient, gentle Sigismunda,
Who can console her with the wretched boast,
She was for thee unhappy!—If I am,
I will be nobly so!——Sicilia's daughters
Shall wondering see in me a great example
Of one who punish'd an ill-judging heart,
Who made it bow to what it most abhorr'd!
Crush'd it to misery! for having thus
So lightly listen'd to a worthless lover!

LAURA.

At last it mounts! the kindling pride of virtue!
Trust me, thy marriage will embitter his——

SIGISMUNDA.

O may the furies light his nuptial torch!
Be it accurs'd as mine! for the fair peace,
The tender joys of hymeneal love,
May jealousy awak'd, and fell remorse,
Pour all their fiercest venom thro' his breast!——
Where the Fates lead, and blind revenge, I follow!—
Let me not think—By injur'd love! I vow,
Thou shalt, base prince! perfidious and inhuman!
Thou shalt behold me in another's arms!
In his thou hatest! Osmond's!

LAURA.

That will grind
His heart with secret rage! Ay, that will sting
His soul to madness! set him up a terror,
A spectacle of woe to faithless lovers!——
Your cooler thought, besides, will of the change
Approve, and think it happy. Noble Osmond
From the same stock with him derives his birth,
First of Sicilian barons, prudent, brave,
Of strictest honour, and by all rever'd——

SIGISMUNDA.

Talk not of Osmond, but perfidious Tancred!
Rail at him, rail! invent new names of scorn!
Assist me, Laura; lend my rage fresh fuel;
Support my staggering purpose, which already
Begins to fail me—Ah, my vaunts how vain!
How have I ly'd to my own heart!—Alas!
My tears return, the mighty flood o'erwhelms me!

Ten thousand crowding images distract
My tortur'd thought——And is it come to this?
Our hopes? our vows? our oft repeated wishes,
Breath'd from the fervent soul, and full of heaven,
To make each other happy?—come to this!

LAURA.

If thy own peace and honour cannot keep
Thy resolution fix'd, yet, Sigismunda,
O think, how deeply, how beyond retreat,
Thy father is engag'd.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah wretched weakness!
That thus enthrals my soul, that chases thence
Each nobler thought, the sense of every duty!—
And have I then no tears for thee, my father?
Can I forget thy cares, from helpless years,
Thy tenderness for me? an eye still beam'd
With love? a brow that never knew a frown?
Nor a harsh word thy tongue? Shall I for these
Repay thy stooping venerable age,
With shame, disquiet, anguish, and dishonour?
It must not be!—Thou first of angels! come,
Sweet filial Piety! and firm my breast!
Yes, let one daughter to her fate submit,
Be nobly wretched—but her father happy!——
Laura!—they come!—O Heavens! I cannot stand
The horrid trial!—Open, open earth!
And hide me from their view!

LAURA.

Madam!

SCENE IV.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND, SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIFFREDI.

My daughter,
Behold my noble friend who courts thy hand,
And whom to call my son I shall be proud;
Nor shall I less be pleas'd in his alliance,
To see thee happy.

OSMOND.

Think not, I presume,
Madam, on this your father's kind consent,
To make me blest. I love you from a heart,
That seeks your good superior to my own;
And will, by every art of tender friendship,
Consult your dearest welfare. May I hope,
Yours does not disavow your father's choice?

SIGISMUNDA.

I am a daughter, Sir—and have no power
O'er my own heart—I die—Support me, Laura.
[*Faints.*

SIFFREDI.

Help—Bear her off—She breathes—my daughter!—

SIGISMUNDA.

Oh!—
Forgive my weakness—soft—my Laura, lead me—
To my apartment.

SIFFREDI.

Pardon me, my lord,
If by this sudden accident alarm'd,
I leave you for a moment.

SCENE V.

OSMOND *alone.*

Let me think——
What can this mean?——Is it to me aversion?
Or is it, as I fear'd, she loves another?
Ha!—yes—perhaps the king, the young count Tancred!
They were bred up together——Surely that,
That cannot be—Has he not given his hand,
In the most solemn manner, to Constantia?
Does not his crown depend upon the deed?
No—if they lov'd, and this old statesman knew it,
He could not to a king prefer a subject.
His virtues I esteem—nay more, I trust them——
So far as virtue goes—but could he place
His daughter on the throne of Sicily——
O 'tis a glorious bribe, too much for man!——
What is it then?—I care not what it be.
My honour now, my dignity demands,
That my propos'd alliance, by her father,
And even herself accepted, be not scorn'd.
I love her too—I never knew till now
To what a pitch I lov'd her. O she shot
Ten thousand charms into my inmost soul!
She look'd so mild, so amiably gentle,
She bow'd her head, she glow'd with such confusion,
Such loveliness of modesty! She is,

In gracious mind, in manners, and in person,
The perfect model of all female beauty !—
She must be mine—She is !—If yet her heart
Consents not to my happiness, her duty,
Join'd to my tender cares, will gain so much
Upon her generous nature—That will follow.

The man of sense, who acts a prudent part,
Not flattering steals, but forms himself the heart.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

The garden belonging to SIFFREDI'S *houſe.*

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

SIGISMUNDA, *with a letter in her hand.*

'TIS done!—I am a slave!—The fatal vow
Has pass'd my lips!—Methought in those sad moments,
The tombs around, the saints, the darken'd altar,
And all the trembling shrines with horror shook.
But here is still new matter of distress.
O Tancred cease to persecute me more!
O grudge me not some calmer state of woe!
Some quiet gloom to shade my hopeless days,
Where I may never hear of love and thee!——
Has Laura too conspir'd against my peace?
Why did you take this letter?—bear it back—
[*Giving her the letter.*
I will not court new pain.

LAURA.

Madam, Rodolpho
Urg'd me so much, nay, even with tears conjur'd me,
But this once more to serve th' unhappy king—
For such he said he was—that tho' enrag'd,
Equal with thee, at his inhuman falsehood,
I could not to my brother's fervent prayers
Refuse this office—Read it—His excuses
Will only more expose his falsehood.

SIGISMUNDA.

No.
It suits not Osmond's wife to read one line
From that contagious hand—she knows too well!

LAURA.

He paints him out distress'd beyond expression,
Even on the point of madness. Wild as winds,
And fighting seas, he raves. His passions mix,
With ceaseless rage, all in each giddy moment.
He dies to see you and to clear his faith.

SIGISMUNDA.

Save me from that!—That would be worse than all!

LAURA.

I but report my brother's words; who then
Began to talk of some dark imposition,
That had deceiv'd us all; when, interrupted,
We heard your father and earl Osmond near,
As summon'd to Constantia's court they went.

SIGISMUNDA.

Ha! imposition!—Well! If I am doom'd
To be, o'er all my sex, the wretch of love,
In vain I would resist—Give me the letter—
To know the worst is some relief——Alas!
It was not thus, with such dire palpitations,
That, Tancred, once I us'd to read thy letters.
[*Attemping to read the letter, but gives it to* Laura.
Ah fond remembrance blinds me!—Read it, Laura.

LAURA *reads.*

" Deliver me, Sigismunda, from that most exquisite
" misery which a faithful heart can suffer—To be
" thought base by her, from whose esteem even virtue

" borrows new charms. When I submitted to my
" cruel situation, it was not falsehood you beheld, but
" an excess of love. Rather than endanger that, I
" for a while gave up my honour. Every moment
" till I see you stabs me with severer pangs than real
" guilt itself can feel. Let me then conjure you to
" meet me in the garden, towards the close of the
" day, when I will explain this mystery. We have
" been most inhumanly abused; and that by the
" means of the very paper which I gave you, from
" the warmest sincerity of love, to assure to you the
" heart and hand of

" TANCRED."

SIGISMUNDA.

There, Laura, there, the dreadful secret sprung!
That paper! ah that paper! it suggests
A thousand horrid thoughts—I to my father
Gave it; and he perhaps—I dare not cast
A look that way—If yet indeed you love me,
O blast me not, kind Tancred, with the truth!
O pitying keep me ignorant for ever!
What strange peculiar misery is mine?
Reduc'd to wish the man I love were false?
Why was I hurry'd to a step so rash?
Repairless woe!—I might have waited, sure,
A few short hours—No duty that forbade—
I ow'd thy love that justice; till this day
Thy love an image of all-perfect goodness!
A beam from Heaven that glow'd with every virtue!
And have I thrown this prize of life away?
The piteous wreck of one distracted moment?
Ah the cold prudence of remorseless age!
Ah parents, traitors to your children's bliss!

Ah curs'd, ah blind revenge!—On every hand
I was betray'd—You, Laura, too, betray'd me!

LAURA.

Who, who, but he, whate'er he writes, betray'd you?
Or false or pusillanimous. For once,
I will with you suppose, that his agreement
To the king's will was forg'd—Tho' forg'd by whom?
Your father scorns the crime—Yet what avails it?
This, if it clears his truth, condemns his spirit.
A youthful king, by love and honour fir'd,
Patient to sit on his insulted throne,
And let an outrage, of so high a nature,
Unpunish'd pass, uncheck'd, uncontradicted—
O 'tis a meanness equal even to falsehood.

SIGISMUNDA.

Laura, no more—We have already judg'd
Too largely without knowledge. Oft, what seems
A trifle, a mere nothing, by itself,
In some nice situations turns the scale
Of Fate, and rules the most important actions.
Yes, I begin to feel a sad presage:
I am undone, from that eternal source
Of human woes—the judgment of the passions.
But what have I to do with these excuses?
O cease my treacherous heart to give them room!
It suits not thee to plead a lover's cause;
Even to lament my fate is now dishonour.
Nought now remains, but with relentless purpose,
To shun all interviews, all clearing up
Of this dark scene; to wrap myself in gloom,
In solitude and shades; there to devour
The silent sorrows ever swelling here;
And since I must be wretched—for I must——

To claim the mighty misery myself,
Engross it all, and spare a hapless father.
Hence, let me fly!—the hour approaches——

LAURA.

Madam,
Behold he comes—the king—

SIGISMUNDA.

Heavens! how escape?
No—I will stay—This one last meeting—Leave me.

SCENE II.

TANCRED, SIGISMUNDA.

TANCRED.

And are these long long hours of torture past?
My life! my Sigismunda!

[*Throwing himself at her feet.*

SIGISMUNDA.

Rise, my lord.
To see my sovereign thus no more becomes me.

TANCRED.

O let me kiss the ground on which you tread!
Let me exhale my soul in softest transport!
Since I again embrace my Sigismunda! [*Rising.*
Unkind! how couldst thou ever deem me false?
How thus dishonour love?—O I could much
Embitter my complaint!—How low were then
Thy thoughts of me? How didst thou then affront
The human heart itself? After the vows,
The fervent truth, the tender protestations,

Which mine has often pour'd, to let thy breast,
Whate'er th' appearance was, admit suspicion?

SIGISMUNDA.

How! when I heard myself your full consent
To the late king's so just and prudent will?
Heard it before you read, in solemn senate?
When I beheld you give your royal hand
To her, whose birth and dignity of right
Demands that high alliance? Yes, my lord,
You have done well. The man, whom Heaven appoints
To govern others, should himself first learn
To bend his passions to the sway of reason.
In all you have done well; but when you bid
My humbled hopes look up to you again,
And sooth'd with wanton cruelty my weakness—
That too was well—My vanity deserv'd
The sharp rebuke, whose fond extravagance
Could ever dream to balance your repose,
Your glory and the welfare of a people.

TANCRED.

Chide on, chide on. Thy soft reproaches now
Instead of wounding, only soothe my fondness.
No, no, thou charming consort of my soul!
I never lov'd thee with such faithful ardour,
As in that cruel miserable moment
You thought me false; when even my honour stoop'd
To wear for thee a baffled face of baseness.
It was thy barbarous father, Sigismunda,
Who caught me in the toil. He turn'd that paper,
Meant for th' assuring bond of nuptial love,
To ruin it for ever; he, he wrote
That forg'd consent, you heard, beneath my name,

Nay dar'd before my out-rag'd throne to read it!
Had he not been thy father—Ha! my love!
You tremble, you grow pale.

SIGISMUNDA.

Oh leave me, Tancred!

TANCRED.

No!—Leave thee?—Never! never! till you set
My heart at peace, till these dear lips again
Pronounce thee mine! Without thee I renounce
Myself, my friends, the world—Here on this hand—

SIGISMUNDA.

My lord, forget that hand, which never now
Can be to thine united——

TANCRED.

Sigismunda!
What dost thou mean?—Thy words, thy look, thy manner,
Seem to conceal some horrid secret—Heavens!——
No—That was wild—Distraction fires the thought!—

SIGISMUNDA.

Enquire no more——I never can be thine.

TANCRED.

What, who shall interpose? who dares attempt
To brave the fury of an injur'd king?
Who, ere he sees thee ravish'd from his hopes,
Will wrap all blazing Sicily in flames—

SIGISMUNDA.

In vain your power, my lord—This fatal error,
Join'd to my father's unrelenting will,
Has plac'd an everlasting bar betwixt us—
I am—earl Osmond's—Wife.

TANCRED.

Earl Osmond's wife!——

[*After a long pause, during which they look at one another with the highest agitation and most tender distress.*

Heavens! did I hear thee right! what! marry'd? marry'd!
Lost to thy faithful Tancred! lost for ever!
Couldst thou then doom me to such matchless woe,
Without so much as hearing me?—Distraction!—
Alas! what hast thou done? Ah Sigismunda!—
Thy rash credulity has done a deed,
Which of two happiest lovers—that e'er felt
The blisful power, has made two finish'd wretches!
But—Madness!——Sure, thou know'st it cannot be!
This hand is mine! a thousand thousand vows——

SCENE III.

TANCRED, OSMOND, SIGISMUNDA.

OSMOND.

[*Snatching her hand from the king.*

Madam, this hand, by the most solemn rites,
A little hour ago, was given to me,
And did not sovereign honour now command me,
Never but with my life to quit my claim,
I would renounce it——thus!

TANCRED.

Ha! who art thou?
Presumptuous man!

SIGISMUNDA, *aside.*

Where is my father? Heavens!

[*Goes out.*

OSMOND.

One thou shouldst better know—Yes—view me—one!
Who can and will maintain his rights and honour,
Against a faithless prince, an upstart king,
Whose first base deed is what a harden'd tyrant
Would blush to act.

TANCRED.

Insolent Osmond! know,
This upstart king will hurl confusion on thee,
And all who shall invade his sacred rights,
Prior, to thine—Thine founded on compulsion,
On infamous deceit, while his proceed
From mutual love and free long-plighted faith.
She is, and shall be mine!—I will annul,
By the high power with which the laws invest me,
Those guilty forms in which you have entrap'd,
Basely entrap'd, to thy detested nuptials,
My queen betroth'd! who has my heart, my hand,
And shall partake my throne—If, haughty lord,
If this thou didst not know, then know it now!
And know besides, as I have told thee this,
Shouldst thou but think to urge thy treason further—
Than treason more! Treason against my love!——
Thy life shall answer for it!

OSMOND.

Ha! my life!——
It moves my scorn to hear thy empty threats.
When was it that a Norman baron's life
Became so vile, as on the frown of kings

To hang?—Of that, my lord, the law must judge:
Or if the law be weak, my guardian sword—

TANCRED.

Dare not to touch it, traitor! lest my rage
Break loose, and do a deed that misbecomes me.

SCENE IV.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI, OSMOND.

SIFFREDI, *entering.*

My gracious lord! what is it, I behold!
My sovereign in contention with his subjects?
Surely this house deserves from royal Tancred
A little more regard, than to be made
A scene of trouble and unseemly jars.
It grieves my soul, it baffles every hope,
It makes me sick of life, to see thy glory
Thus blasted in the bud—Heavens! can your highness
From your exalted character descend,
The dignity of virtue; and, instead
Of being the protector of our rights,
The holy guardian of domestic bliss,
Unkindly thus disturb the sweet repose,
The secret peace of families, for which
Alone the freeborn race of man to laws
And government submitted?

TANCRED.

My lord Siffredi,
Spare thy rebuke. The duties of my station
Are not to me unknown.—But thou, old man,
Dost thou not blush to talk of rights invaded?

And of our best our dearest bliss disturb'd ?
Thou! who with more than barbarous perfidy
Hast trampled all allegiance, justice, truth,
Humanity itself, beneath thy feet ?
Thou know'st thou hast—I could, to thy confusion,
Return thy hard reproaches; but I spare thee
Before this lord, for whose ill-sorted friendship
Thou hast most basely sacrific'd thy daughter.
Farewel, my lord!—For thee, lord constable,
Who dost presume to lift thy surly eye
To my soft love, my gentle Sigismunda,
I once again command thee, on thy life——
Yes—chew thy rage—but mark me—on thy life,
No further urge thy arrogant pretensions!

SCENE V.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND.

OSMOND.

Ha! arrogant pretensions! heaven and earth!
What! arrogant pretensions to my wife!
My wedded wife! Where are we? In a land
Of civil rule, of liberty and laws?——
Not on my life pursue them?—Giddy prince!
My life disdains thy nod. It is the gift
Of parent heaven, who gave me too an arm,
A spirit to defend it against tyrants.
The Norman race, the sons of mighty Rollo,
Who rushing in a tempest from the north,
Great nurse of generous freemen! bravely won
With their own swords their seats, and still possess them
By the same noble tenure, are not us'd

To hear such language—If I now desist,
Then brand me for a coward! deem me villain!
A traitor to the public! By this conduct
Deceiv'd, betray'd, insulted, tyranniz'd.
Mine is a common cause. My arm shall guard,
Mix'd with my own, the rights of each Sicilian,
Of social life, and of mankind in general.
Ere to thy tyrant rage they fall a prey,
I shall find means to shake thy tottering throne,
Which this illegal, this perfidious usage
Forfeits at once, and crush thee in the ruins!
Constantia is my queen!

SIFFREDI.

Lord constable,
Let us be stedfast in the right; but let us
Act with cool prudence, and with manly temper,
As well as manly firmness. True, I own,
Th' indignities you suffer are so high,
As might even justify what now you threaten.
But if, my lord, we can prevent the woes,
The cruel horrors of intestine war,
Yet hold untouch'd our liberties and laws;
O let us, rais'd above the turbid sphere
Of little selfish passions, nobly do it!
Nor to our hot intemperate pride pour out
A dire libation of Sicilian blood.
'Tis godlike magnanimity, to keep,
When most provok'd, our reason calm and clear,
And execute her will, from a strong sense
Of what is right, without the vulgar aid
Of heat and passion, which, tho' honest, bear us
Often too far. Remember that my house
Protects my daughter still; and ere I saw her
Thus ravish'd from us, by the arm of power,

This hand should act the Roman father's part.
Fear not; be temperate; all will yet be well.
I know the king. At first his passions burst
Quick as the lightning's flash; but in his breast
Honour and justice dwell—Trust me, to reason
He will return.

OSMOND.

He will!—By Heavens, he shall!—
You know the king—I wish, my lord Siffredi,
That you had deign'd to tell me all you knew—
And would you have me wait with duteous patience,
Till he return to reason? Ye just Powers!
When he has planted on our necks his foot,
And trod us into slaves; when his vain pride
Is cloy'd with our submission; if, at last,
He finds his arm too weak to shake the frame
Of wide-establish'd order out of joint,
And overturn all justice; then, perchance,
He, in a fit of sickly kind repentance,
May make a merit to return to reason.
No, no, my lord!—There is a nobler way,
To teach the blind oppressive *Fury* reason:
Oft has the lustre of avenging steel
Unseal'd her stupid eyes—The sword is reason!

SCENE VI.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND, RODOLPHO, *with Guards.*

RODOLPHO.

My lord high constable of Sicily,
In the king's name, and by his special order,
I here arrest you prisoner of state.

OSMOND.

What king? I know no king of Sicily—
Unless he be the husband of Constantia.

RODOLPHO.

Then know him now——Behold his royal orders
To bear you to the castle of Palermo.

SIFFREDI.

Let the big torrent foam its madness off.
Submit, my lord—No castle long can hold
Our wrongs—This, more than friendship or alliance,
Confirms me thine; this binds me to thy fortunes,
By the strong tye of common injury,
Which nothing can dissolve——I grieve, Rodolpho,
To see the reign in such unhappy sort
Begin.

OSMOND.

The reign! the usurpation call it!
This meteor king may blaze awhile, but soon
Must spend his idle terrors—Sir, lead on——
Farewel, my lord——More than my life and fortune,
Remember well, is in your hands——my honour!

SIFFREDI.

Our honour is the same. My son farewel——
We shall not long be parted. On these eyes
Sleep shall not shed his balm, till I behold thee
Restor'd to freedom, or partake thy bonds.

Even noble courage is not void of blame,
Till nobler patience sanctifies its flame.

ACT V. SCENE I.

SIFFREDI, *alone.*

THE prospect lowrs around. I found the king,
Tho' calm'd a little, with subsiding tempest,
As suits his generous nature, yet in love
Abated nought, most ardent in his purpose;
Inexorably fix'd, whate'er the risque,
To claim my daughter, and dissolve this marriage—
I have embark'd, upon a perilous sea,
A mighty treasure. Here the rapid youth,
Th' impetuous passions of a lover-king
Check my bold course; and there, the jealous pride,
Th' impatient honour of a haughty lord
Of the first rank, in interest and dependants
Near equal to the king, forbid retreat.
My honour too, the same unchang'd conviction,
That these my measures were, and still remain
Of absolute necessity, to save
The land from civil fury, urge me on.
But how proceed?—I only faster rush
Upon the desperate evils I would shun.
Whate'er the motive be, deceit, I fear,
And harsh unnatural force are not the means
Of public welfare or of private bliss—
Bear witness, Heaven! Thou mind-inspecting eye!
My breast is pure. I have prefer'd my duty,
The good and safety of my fellow-subjects,
To all those views that fire the selfish race
Of men, and mix them in eternal broils.

Enter an OFFICER *belonging to* SIFFREDI.

OFFICER.

My lord, a man of noble port, his face
Wrapp'd in disguise, is earnest for admission.

SIFFREDI.

Go bid him enter— [Officer *goes out*
Ha! wrapp'd in disguise!
And at this late unseasonable hour!
When o'er the world tremendous midnight reigns,
By the dire gloom of raging tempest doubled—

SCENE II.

SIFFREDI, OSMOND, *discovering himself*,

SIFFREDI.

What! ha! earl Osmond, you?—Welcome, once more,
To this glad roof!—But why in this disguise?
Would I could hope the king exceeds his promise!
I have his faith soon as to-morrow's sun
Shall gild Sicilia's cliffs, you shall be free.——
Has some good angel turn'd his heart to justice?

OSMOND.

It is not by the favour of count Tancred
That I am here. As much I scorn his favour,
As I defy his tyranny and threats——
Our friend Goffredo, who commands the castle,
On my parole, ere dawn, to render back
My person, has permitted me this freedom.
Know then; the faithless outrage of to-day,
By him committed whom you call the king,

Has rous'd Constantia's court. Our friends, the friends
Of virtue, justice, and of public faith,
Ripe for revolt, are in high ferment all.
This, this, they say, exceeds whate'er deform'd
The miserable days we saw beneath
William the Bad. This saps the solid base,
At once, of government and private life;
This shameless imposition on the faith,
The majesty of senates, this lewd insult,
This violation of the rights of men.
Added to these, his ignominious treatment
Of her, th' illustrious offspring of our kings,
Sicilia's hope, and now our royal mistress.
You know, my lord, how grossly these infringe
The late king's will: which orders, if count Tancred
Make not Constantia partner of his throne,
That he be quite excluded the succession,
And she to Henry given, king of the Romans,
The potent emperor Barbarossa's son,
Who seeks with earnest instance her alliance.
I thence of you, as guardian of the laws,
As guardian of this Will to you entrusted,
Desire, nay more, demand your instant aid,
To see it put in vigorous execution.

SIFFREDI.

You cannot doubt, my lord, of my concurrence.
Who more than I have labour'd this great point?
Tis my own plan. And if I drop it now,
I should be justly branded with the shame
Of rash advice, or despicable weakness.
But let us not precipitate the matter.
Constantia's friends are numerous and strong;
Yet Tancred's, trust me, are of equal force.

E'er since the secret of his birth was known,
The people all are in a tumult hurl'd
Of boundless joy, to hear there lives a prince
Of mighty Guiscard's line. Numbers, besides,
Of powerful barons, who at heart had pin'd,
To see the reign of their renown'd forefathers,
Won by immortal deeds of matchless valour,
Pass from the gallant Normans to the Suevi,
Will with a kind of rage espouse his cause—
'Tis so, my lord—be not by passion blinded——
'Tis surely so—O if our prating virtue
Dwells not in words alone—O let us join,
My generous Osmond, to avert these woes,
And yet sustain our tott'ring Norman kingdom!

OSMOND.

But how, Siffredi? how?—If by soft means
We can maintain our rights, and save our country,
May his unnatural blood first stain the sword,
Who with unpitying fury first shall draw it!

SIFFREDI.

I have a thought—The glorious work be thine.
But it requires an awful flight of virtue,
Above the passions of the vulgar breast,
And thence from thee I hope it, Noble Osmond—
Suppose my daughter, to her God devoted,
Were plac'd within some convent's sacred verge,
Beneath the dread protection of the altar—

OSMOND.

Ere then, by Heavens! I would devoutly shave
My holy scalp, turn whining monk myself,
And pray incessant for the tyrant's safety!—
What! How! because an insolent invader,

A sacrilegious tyrant, in contempt
Of all those noblest rights, which to maintain
Is man's peculiar pride, demands my wife;
That I shall thus betray the common cause
Of human kind, and tamely yield her up,
Even in the manner you propose—O then
I were supremely vile! degraded! sham'd!
The scorn of manhood! and abhorr'd of honour!

SIFFREDI.

There is, my lord, an honour, the calm child
Of reason, of humanity and mercy,
Superior far to this punctilious demon,
That singly minds itself, and oft embroils
With proud barbarian niceties the world!

OSMOND.

My lord, my lord!—I cannot brook your prudence—
It holds a pulse unequal to my blood———
Unblemish'd honour is the flower of virtue!
The vivyfying soul! and he who slights it
Will leave the other dull and lifeless dross.

SIFFREDI.

No more——You are too warm.

OSMOND.

You are too cool.

SIFFREDI.

Too cool, my lord? I were indeed too cool,
Not to resent this language, and to tell thee
I wish earl Osmond were as cool as I
To his own selfish bliss—ay, and as warm
To that of others—But of this no more—
My daughter is thy wife—I gave her to thee,

And will against all force maintain her thine.
But think not I will catch thy headlong passions,
Whirl'd in a blaze of madness o'er the land;
Or till the last extremity compel me,
Risque the dire means of war. The king to-morrow
Will set you free; and if by gentle means
He does not yield my daughter to your arms,
And wed Constantia, as the will requires,
Why then expect me on the side of justice——
Let that suffice.

OSMOND.

It does—Forgive my heat.
My rankled mind, by injuries inflam'd,
May be too prompt to take and give offence.

SIFFREDI.

'Tis past—Your wrongs, I own, may well transport
The wisest mind—But henceforth, noble Osmond,
Do me more justice, honour more my truth,
Nor mark me with an eye of squint suspicion—
These jars apart—You may repose your soul
On my firm faith and unremitting friendship.
Of that I sure have given exalted proof,
And the next sun we see, shall prove it further—
Return, my son, and from your friend Goffredo
Release your word. There try, by soft repose,
To calm your breast.

OSMOND.

Bid the vext ocean sleep,
Swept by the pinions of the raging north——
But your frail age, by care and toil exhausted,
Demands the balm of all-repairing rest.

SIFFREDI.

Soon as to-morrow's dawn shall streak the skies,
I, with my friends in solemn state assembled,
Will to the palace, and demand your freedom,
Then by calm reason, or by higher means,
The king shall quit his claim, and in the face
Of Sicily, my daughter shall be yours.
Farewel.

OSMOND.

My lord, good night.

SCENE III.

OSMOND *alone.* [*After a long pause.*

I like him not——
Yes—I have mighty matter of suspicion.
'Tis plain—I see it lurking in his breast,
He has a foolish fondness for this king—
My honour is not safe, while here my wife
Remains—Who knows but he this very night
May bear her to some convent as he mention'd—
The king too—tho' I smother'd up my rage,
I mark'd it well—will set me free to-morrow.
Why not to-night? He has some dark design—
By Heavens! he has—I am abus'd most grossly;
Made the vile tool of this old statesman's schemes;
Marry'd to one—Ay, and he knew it,—one
Who loves young Tancred! Hence her swooning, tears,
And all her soft distress, when she disgrac'd me
By basely giving her perfidious hand
Without her heart—Hell and perdition! this,
This is the perfidy!—This is the fell,

The keen, envenom'd, exquisite disgrace!
Which to a man of honour even exceeds
The falsehood of the person—But I now
Will rouse me from the poor tame lethargy,
By my believing fondness cast upon me.
I will not wait his crawling timid motions,
Perhaps to blind me meant, which he to-morrow
Has promis'd to pursue. No! ere his eyes
Shall open on to morrow's orient beam,
I will convince him that earl Osmond never
Was form'd to be his dupe—I know full well
Th' important weight and danger of the deed:
But to a man, whom greater dangers press,
Driven to the brink of infamy and horror,
Rashness itself, and utter desperation,
Are the best prudence—I will bear her off
This night, and lodge her in a place of safety.
I have a trusty band that waits not far,
Hence! let me lose no time—One rapid moment
Should ardent form, at once, and execute
A bold design—'Tis fix'd—'Tis done!—Yes, then,
When I have seiz'd the prize of love and honour,
And with a friend secur'd her; to the castle
I will repair, and claim Goffredo's promise
To rise with all his garrison—my friends
With brave impatience wait. The mine is laid,
And only wants my kindling touch to spring.

SCENE IV.

SIGISMUNDA's *Apartment.*

SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

LAURA.

Heavens! 'tis a fearful night!

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah! the black rage
Of midnight tempest, or th' assuring smiles
Of radiant morn are equal all to me.
Nought now has charms or terrors to my breast,
The seat of stupid woe!—Leave me, my Laura.
Kind rest, perhaps, may hush my woes a little—
Oh for that quiet sleep that knows no morning!

LAURA.

Madam, indeed I know not how to go.
Indulge my fondness—Let me watch a while
By your sad bed, till these dread hours shall pass.

SIGISMUNDA.

Alas! what is the toil of elements,
This idle perturbation of the sky,
To what I feel within!—Oh that the fires
Of pitying Heaven would point their fury here!
Good night, my dearest Laura!

LAURA.

O I know not
What this oppression means—But 'tis with pain,
With tears, I can persuade myself to leave you—
Well then—Good night, my dearest Sigismunda!

SCENE V.

SIGISMUNDA.

And am I then alone?—The most undone,
Most wretched being now beneath the cope
Of this affrighting gloom that wraps the world!——
I said I did not fear—Ah me! I feel
A shivering horror run thro' all my powers!
O I am nought but tumult, fears and weakness!
And yet how idle fear when hope is gone,
Gone, gone for ever!—O thou gentle scene
[*Looking towards her bed.*
Of sweet repose, where by the oblivious draught
Of each sad toilsome day, to peace restor'd
Unhappy mortals lose their woes awhile,
Thou hast no peace for me!—What shall I do?
How pass this dreadful night, so big with terror?—
Here with the midnight shades, here will I sit,
[*Sitting down.*
A prey to dire despair, and ceaseless weep
The hours away—Bless me—I heard a noise——
[*Starting up.*
No—I mistook—Nothing but silence reigns
And awful midnight round—Again! O Heavens!
My lord the king!

SCENE VI.

TANCRED, SIGISMUNDA.

TANCRED.

Be not alarmed my love!

SIGISMUNDA.

My royal lord! why at this midnight hour,
How came you hither?

TANCRED.

By that secret way
My love contriv'd, when we in happier days,
Us'd to devote these hours, so much in vain,
To vows of love and everlasting friendship.

SIGISMUNDA.

Why will you thus persist to add new stings
To her distress, who never can be thine?
O fly me! fly! You know——

TANCRED.

I know too much.
O how I could reproach thee, Sigismunda!
Pour out my injur'd soul in just complaints!
But now the time permits not, these swift moments—
I told thee how thy father's artifice
Forc'd me to seem perfidious in thy eyes.
Ah, fatal blindness! not to have observ'd
The mingled pangs of rage and love that shook me:
When, by my cruel public situation
Compell'd, I only feign'd consent, to gain

A little time, and more secure thee mine.
E'er since—a dreadful interval of care!
My thoughts have been employ'd, not without hope,
How to defeat Siffredi's barbarous purpose.
But thy credulity has ruin'd all,
Thy rash, thy wild—I know not what to name it——
Oh, it has prov'd the giddy hopes of man
To be delusion all, and sickening folly!

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah, generous Tancred! ah thy truth destroys me!
Yes, yes, 'tis I, 'tis I alone am false!
My hasty rage, join'd to my tame submission,
More than the most exalted filial duty
Could e'er demand, has dash'd our cup of fate
With bitterness unequall'd—But, alas!
What are thy woes to mine?—to mine! just Heaven!—
Now is thy turn of vengeance—hate, renounce me!
O leave me to the fate I well deserve,
To sink in hopeless misery!—at least,
Try to forget the worthless Sigismunda!

TANCRED.

Forget thee! No! Thou art my soul itself!
I have no thought, no hope, no wish but thee!
Even this repented injury, the fears,
That rouse me all to madness, at the thought
Of losing thee, the whole collected pains
Of my full heart, serve but to make thee dearer!
Ah, how forget thee!—Much must be forgot,
Ere Tancred can forget his Sigismunda!

SIGISMUNDA.

But you, my lord, must make that great effort.

TANCRED.

Can Sigismunda make it?

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah! I know not
With what success—But all that feeble woman
And love-entangled reason can perform,
I, to the utmost, will exert to do it.

TANCRED.

Fear not—'tis done!—If thou canst form the thought,
Success is sure—I am forgot already!

SIGISMUNDA.

Ah Tancred!—But, my lord, respect me more.
Think who I am—What can you now propose?

TANCRED.

To claim the plighted vows which Heaven has heard,
To vindicate the rights of holy love
By faith and honour bound, to which compar'd
These empty forms, which have ensnar'd thy hand,
Are impious guile, abuse, and profanation——
Nay, as a king, whose high prerogative
By this unlicens'd marriage is affronted,
To bid the laws themselves pronounce it void.

SIGISMUNDA.

Honour, my lord, is much too proud to catch
At every slender twig of nice distinctions.
These for th' unfeeling vulgar may do well:
But those, whose souls are by the nicer rule
Of virtuous delicacy nobly sway'd,
Stand at another bar than that of laws.
Then cease to urge me—Since I am not born

To that exalted fate to be your queen—
Or, yet a dearer name—to be your wife!——
I am the wife of an illustrious lord
Of your own princely blood; and what I am,
I will with proper dignity remain.
Retire, my royal lord—There is no means
To cure the wounds this fatal day has given.
We meet no more!

TANCRED.

Oh barbarous Sigismunda!
And canst thou talk thus steadily? thus treat me
With such unpitying, unrelenting rigour?
Poor is the love, that rather than give up
A little pride, a little formal pride,
The breath of vanity! can bear to see
The man, whose heart was once so dear to thine
By many a tender vow so mix'd together,
A prey to anguish, fury and distraction!—
Thou canst not surely make me such a wretch,
Thou canst not, Sigismunda!—Yet relent,
O save us yet!—Rodolpho, with my guards,
Waits in the garden—Let us seize the moments
We ne'er may have again—With more than power
I will assert thee mine, with fairest honour.
The world shall even approve; each honest bosom
Swell with a kindred joy to see us happy.

SIGISMUNDA.

The world approve! What is the world to me?
The conscious mind is its own awful world.——
And yet, perhaps, if thou wert not a king,
I know not, Tancred, what I might have done.
Then, then, my conduct, sanctify'd by love,
Could not be deem'd, by the severest judge,

The mean effect of interest or ambition.
But now not all my partial heart can plead,
Shall ever shake th' unalterable dictates
That tyrannize my breast.

TANCRED.

'Tis well—No more—
I yield me to my fate—Yes, yes inhuman!
Since thy barbarian heart is steel'd by pride,
Shut up to love and pity, here behold me
Cast on the ground, a vile and abject wretch!
Lost to all cares, all dignities, all duties!
Here will I grow, breathe out my faithful soul,
Here at thy feet—Death, death alone shall part us!

SIGISMUNDA.

Have you then vow'd to drive me to perdition?
What can I more?—Yes, Tancred! once again
I will forget the dignity my station
Commands me to sustain—for the last time
Will tell thee, that, I fear, no ties, no duty,
Can ever root thee from my hapless bosom.
O leave me! fly me! were it but in pity!
To see what once we tenderly have lov'd,
Cut off from every hope—cut off for ever!
Is pain thy generosity should spare me,
Then rise, my lord; and if you truly love me;
If you respect my honour, nay, my peace,
Retire! for tho' th' emotions of my heart
Can ne'er alarm my virtue; yet, alas!
They tear it so, they pierce it with such anguish—
Oh, 'tis too much!—I cannot bear the conflict!

SCENE VII.

TANCRED, OSMOND, SIGISMUNDA.

OSMOND, *entering.*

Turn, tyrant! turn! and answer to my honour,
For this thy base insufferable outrage!

TANCRED.

Insolent traitor! think not to escape
Thyself my vengeance! [*They fight.* Osmond *falls.*

SIGISMUNDA.

Help here! help!—O Heavens!
[*Throwing herself down by him.*
Alas! my lord, what meant your headlong rage?
That faith, which I this day, upon the altar,
To you devoted, is unblemish'd, pure,
As vestal truth; was resolutely yours,
Beyond the power of aught on earth to shake it.

OSMOND.

Perfidious woman! die!———
[*Shortening his sword, he plunges it into her breast.*
And to the grave
Attend a husband, yet but half aveng'd?

TANCRED.

O horror! horror! execrable villain!

OSMOND.

And, tyrant! thou!—Thou shalt not o'er my tomb
Exult—'Tis well—'Tis great!—I die content!—
[*Dies.*

SCENE VIII.

TANCRED, SIFFREDI, RODOLPHO, SIGISMUNDA, LAURA.

TANCRED.

[*Throwing himself down by* Sigismunda.

Quick! here! bring aid!—All in Palermo bring
Whose skill can save her!—Ah! that gentle bosom
Pours fast the streams of life.

SIGISMUNDA.

All aid is vain,
I feel the powerful hand of death upon me—
But, oh! it sheds a sweetness thro' my fate,
That I am thine again; and without blame,
May in my Tancred's arms resign my soul!

TANCRED.

Oh, death is in that voice! so gently mild,
So sadly sweet, as mixes even with mine
The tears of hovering angels!—Mine again!——
And is it thus the cruel Fates have join'd us!
Are these the horrid nuptials they prepare
For love like ours? Is virtue thus rewarded?
Let not my impious rage accuse just Heaven!
Thou, Tancred! Thou! hast murder'd Sigismunda!
That furious man was but the tool of Fate,
I, I the cause!—But, I will do thee justice
On this deaf heart! that to thy tender wisdom
Refus'd an ear—Yes, death shall soon unite us!

SIGISMUNDA, Act V. Scene 8.

London, Publish'd Jan.y 1.st 1788, by T. Cadell in the Strand.

SIGISMUNDA.

Live, live, my Tancred!—Let my death suffice
To expiate all that may have been amiss.
May it appease the Fates, avert their fury
From thy propitious reign! Mean-time, of me
And of thy glory mindful, live, I charge thee,
To guard our friends, and make thy people happy—
[*Observing* Siffredi *fixt in astonishment and grief.*
My father!——Oh! how shall I lift my eyes
To thee my sinking father!

SIFFREDI.

Awful Heaven!
I am chastis'd——My dearest child!——

SIGISMUNDA.

Where am I?
A fearful darkness closes all around—
My friends! We needs must part—I must obey
Th' imperious call—Farewel, my Laura! cherish
My poor afflicted father's age—Rodolpho,
Now is the time to watch th' unhappy king,
With all the care and tenderness of friendship—
Oh my dear father! bow'd beneath the weight
Of age and grief—the victim even of virtue,
Receive my last adieu!—Where art thou, Tancred?
Give me thy hand—But, ah!—it cannot save me
From the dire king of terrors, whose cold power
Creeps o'er my heart——Oh!

TANCRED.

How these pangs distract me!
O lift thy gracious eyes;——Thou leav'st me then!
Thou leav'st me, Sigismunda!

SIGISMUNDA.

Yet a moment—
I had, my Tancred, something more to say——
Yes——but thy love and tenderness for me
Sure makes it needless—Harbour no resentment
Against my father; venerate his zeal,
That acted from a principle of goodness,
From faithful love to thee—Live, and maintain
My innocence imbalm'd, with holiest care
Preserve my spotless memory!——I die——
ETERNAL MERCY take my trembling soul!
Oh! 'tis the only sting of death to part
From those we love—from thee—farewel, my Tancred!
[*Dies.*

TANCRED.

Thus then!
[*Flying to his sword, is held by* Rodolpho.

RODOLPHO.

Hold! hold! my lord!—Have you forgot
Your Sigismunda's last request already?

TANCRED.

Off! set me free! Think not to bind me down,
With barbarous friendship, to the rack of life!
What hand can shut the thousand thousand gates,
Which death still opens to the woes of mortals?—
I shall find means—No power in earth or heaven
Can force me to endure the hateful light,
Thus robb'd of all that lent it joy and sweetness!
Off! traitors! off! or my distracted soul
Will burst indignant from this jail of nature,
To where she beckons yonder—No, mild seraph!
Point not to life——I cannot linger here,
Cut off from thee, the miserable pity,

The scorn of human kind!——A trampled king!
Who let his mean poor-hearted love, one moment,
To coward prudence stoop; who made it not
The first undoubting action of his reign,
To snatch thee to his throne, and there to shield thee,
Thy helpless bosom from a ruffian's fury!——
O shame! O agony! O the fell stings
Of late, of vain repentance!——Ha! my brain
Is all on fire! a wild abyss of thought!
Th' infernal world discloses! See! behold him!
Lo! with fierce smiles he shakes the bloody steel,
And mocks my feeble tears!—Hence! quickly, hence!
Spurn his vile carcass! give it to the dogs!
Expose it to the winds and screaming ravens!
Or hurl it down that fiery steep to hell,
There with his soul to toss in flames for ever!——
Ah, impotence of rage!—What am I? where?
Sad, silent, all?—The forms of dumb despair,
Around some mournful tomb!—What do I see?
This soft abode of innocence and love
Turn'd to the house of death! a place of horror!——
Ah! that poor corse! pale! pale! deform'd with murder!
Is that my Sigismunda!

[*Throwing himself down by her.*

SIFFREDI.

[*After a pathetic pause, looking on the scene before him.*

Have I liv'd
To these enfeebled years, by Heaven reserv'd
To be a dreadful monument of justice!——
Rodolpho, raise the king, and bear him hence
From this distracting scene of blood and death.
Alas! I dare not give him my assistance;
My care would only more inflame his rage.

EPILOGUE.

On France and You then rose my brightning star,
With social ray—The Arts are ne'er at war.
O, as your fire and genius stronger blaze,
As yours are generous Freedom's bolder lays,
Let not the Gallic taste leave yours behind,
In decent manners and in life refin'd;
Banish the motly mode, to tag low verse,
The laughing ballad to the mournful herse.
When thro' five acts your hearts have learnt to glow,
Touch'd with the sacred force of honest woe;
O keep the dear impression on your breast,
Nor idly lose it for a wretched jest.

CORIOLANUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

PROLOGUE.

WRITTEN BY

The Hon. GEORGE LYTTLETON, Esq.

SPOKEN BY MR. QUIN.

I COME not here your candour to implore
For scenes, whose author is, alas! no more;
He wants no advocate his cause to plead;
You will yourselves be patrons of the dead.
No party his benevolence confin'd,
No sect—alike it flow'd to all mankind.
He lov'd his friends (forgive this gushing tear:
Alas! I feel I am no actor here)
He lov'd his friends with such a warmth of heart,
So clear of int'rest, so devoid of art,
Such generous friendship, such unshaken zeal,
No words can speak it, but our tears may tell.——
O candid truth, O faith without a stain,
O manners gently firm, and nobly plain,
O sympathizing love of others bliss,
Where will you find another breast like his?
Such was the man—the poet well you know:
Oft has he touch'd your hearts with tender woe:
Oft in this crowded house, with just applause
You heard him teach fair Virtue's purest laws;
For his chaste Muse employ'd her heav'n-taught lyre
None but the noblest passions to inspire,
Not one immoral, one corrupted thought,
One line, which dying he could wish to blot.
Oh, may to-night your favourable doom
Another laurel add to grace his tomb:
Whilst he, superior now to praise or blame,
Hears not the feeble voice of human fame.
Yet if to those, whom most on earth he lov'd,
From whom his pious care is now remov'd,

PROLOGUE.

With whom his liberal hand, and bounteous heart,
Shar'd all his little fortune could impart;
If to those friends your kind regard shall give
What they no longer can from him receive,
That, that, even now, above yon starry pole,
May touch with pleasure his immortal soul.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

CAIUS MARCIUS CORIOLANUS, . .	Mr. QUIN.
ATTIUS TULLUS, General of the Volscian army, ...	Mr. RYAN.
GALESUS, one of the deputies of the Volscian states attending the camp,	Mr. DELANE.
The other deputies of the Volscian states.	
VOLUSIUS, one of the principal Volcian officers, ...	Mr. SPARKS.
TITUS, freed-man of Galesus, . .	Mr. RIDOUT.
MARCUS MINUCIUS, Consul and principal of the deputation from Rome to Coriolanus, ...	Mr. BRIDGWATER.
POSTHUMUS COMINIUS, a consular senator, one of the deputation, and who had been the Roman General at the taking of Corioli, . . .	Mr. ANDERSON.
VETURIA, mother of Coriolanus,	Mrs. WOFFINGTON.
VOLUMNIA, wife of Coriolanus,	Miss BELLAMY.

ROMAN Senators, Priests, Augurs, &c. of the first deputation. ROMAN Ladies in the train of VETURIA and VOLUMNIA, of the second deputation.

VOLSCIAN OFFICERS, LICTORS, SOLDIERS, &c.

SCENE, The Volscian Camp.

CORIOLANUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The VOLSCIAN *Camp.*

ATTIUS TULLUS, VOLUSIUS.

VOLUSIUS.

HENCE is it, Tullus, that our arms are stopt
e on the borders of the Roman state?
y sleeps that spirit, whose heroic ardor
'd you to break the truce, and pour'd our host,
n all th' united cantons of the Volsci,
their unguarded frontier! Such designs
ok not an hour's delay; their whole success
ends on instant vigorous execution.

TULLUS.

usius, I approve thy brave impatience:
will to thee, in confidence of friendship,
lose my secret soul. Thou know'st Galesus,

Whose freedom Caius Marcius, once his guest,
Of all the spoil of sack'd Corioli,
Alone demanded; and who thence to Rome,
From gratitude and friendship, followed Marcius;
Whence lately to our Antium he return'd,
With overtures of peace propos'd by Rome.

VOLUSIUS.

I know him well; an antiquated sage
Of that romantic school Pythagoras
Establish'd here on our Hesperian shore;
Whose gentle dictates only serve to tame
Enfeebled mortals into slaves.

TULLUS.

Galesus,
Doubtless, possesses many civil virtues;
Is gentle, good; for rectitude of heart,
And innocence of life by all rever'd.

VOLUSIUS.

Pardon me, Tullus, if my faithful bluntness
Deems you too liberal in his praise. In peace
Such may perhaps do well, when prating rules
An idle world; but in tempestuous times
They are stark naught, these visionary statesmen
Fit rulers only for their golden age.
The rugged genius of rapacious Rome
For other men, and other counsels, calls.

TULLUS.

Your thoughts are mine—I only meant to tell thee
The part he bears in this ill-tim'd delay.
Soon as our gather'd army march'd from Antium,
The Roman senate, whose attentive caution

Watch'd all our motions, took at once th' alarm;
And sent a herald, ere we pass'd their borders,
With formal ceremony, to demand
The cause of our approach.—Had I been master,
I would have answer'd at the gates of Rome.
But this Galesus, who attends our camp
Among the Volscian deputies, so pleaded
The laws of nations, made such loud complaints
Against th' infraction of the public faith,
So teaz'd us with the pedantry of states,
That I was forc'd, unwilling, to permit
His freedman Titus, to be sent to Rome
With our demands. If these the senate grants,
We then are in the toils of peace entangled,
In spite of all my efforts to avoid them.

VOLUSIUS.

O, 'tis a wild chimera! Peace with Rome!
Dream not of that, unless the Volscian courage
Is quite subdu'd, and only seeks to gild
A vile submission with that specious name.
Learn wisdom from your neighbours. Peace with Rome
Has quell'd the Latines, tam'd their free-born spirit,
And by her friendship honour'd them with chains.

TULLUS.

She ne'er will grant it on the just conditions
I now have brought the Volsci to demand:
The restitution of our conquer'd cities,
And fair alliance upon equal terms.
I know the Roman insolence will scorn
To yield to this: and Titus must return,
Within three days, the longest term allow'd him;
Of which the third is near elaps'd already.

Then even Galesus will not dare to stop us
With superstitious forms, and solemn trifles,
From letting loose th' unbridled rage of war
Against those hated tyrants of Hesperia.

VOLUSIUS.

Thanks to the gods! my sword will then be free.
Then, poor Corioli! thy bleeding wounds,
Thy treasures sack'd, thy captive matrons,
Shall amply be reveng'd by thy Volusius;
Then, Tullus, from the lofty brows of Marcius
Thou may'st regain the wreaths his conquering hand,
By partial fortune aided, tore from thine.

TULLUS.

O my Volusius! thou, who art a soldier,
A try'd and brave one too, say, in thy heart
Dost thou not scorn me? thou who saw'st me bend
Beneath the half-spent thunder of a foe,
Warm from the conquest of Corioli,
Which, rushing furious in with those, whose sally
He had repell'd, he seiz'd almost alone;
And gave to fire and sword. Yet thence he flew
Scorning the plunder of our richest city,
His wounds undrest, without a moment's respite,
To where our armies on the fearful edge
Of battle stood; and, asking of the consul
To be oppos'd to me, with mighty rage,
Resistless, bore us down.

VOLUSIUS.

True valour, Tullus,
Lies in the mind, the never-yielding purpose,
Nor owns the blind award of giddy Fortune.

TULLUS.

My soul, my friend, my soul is all on fire!
Thirst of revenge consumes me! the revenge
Of generous emulation, not of hatred.
This happy Roman, this proud Marcius haunts me.
Each troubled night when slaves and captives sleep,
Forgetful of their chains, I, in my dreams,
Anew am vanquish'd; and, beneath the sword
With horror sinking, feel a tenfold death,
The death of honour. But I will redeem—
Yes, Marcius, I will yet redeem my fame.
To face thee once again is the great purpose
For which alone I live—Till then how slow,
How tedious lags the time! while shame corrodes me,
With many a bitter thought; and injur'd honour
Sick, and desponding, preys upon itself.

VOLUSIUS.

It fast approaches now, the hour of vengeance,
To this fam'd land, to ancient Latium due.
Unbalanc'd Rome, at variance with herself,
To order lost, in deep and hot commotion,
Stands on the dangerous point of civil war;
Her haughty nobles, and seditious commons
Reviling, fearing, hating one another;
While, on our part, all wears a prosperous face;
Our troops united, numerous, high in spirit,
As if their gen'ral's soul inform'd them all.
O long-expected day!

TULLUS.

Go, brave Volusius,
Go breathe thy ardor into every breast,
That when the Volscian envoy shall return,
Whom ere the close of evening I expect,

One spirit may unite us in the cause
Of generous freedom, and our native rights,
So long oppress'd by Rome's encroaching power.

SCENE II.

TULLUS *alone.*

Galesus said that Marcius stands for consul.
O favour thou his suit, propitious Jove!
That I may brave him at his army's head,
In all the majesty of sovereign pow'r!
That the whole conduct of the war may rest
On us alone, and prove by it's decision,
Which of the two is worthiest to command——

SCENE III.

TULLUS, OFFICER.

TULLUS.

Ha! why this haste? you look alarm'd.

OFFICER.

My lord,
One of exalted port, his visage hid,
Has plac'd himself upon your sacred hearth,
Beneath the dread protection of your Lares;
And sits majestic there in solemn silence.

TULLUS.

Did you not ask him who, and what he was?

OFFICER.

My lord, I could not speak; I felt appall'd,
As if the presence of some God had struck me.

TULLUS.

Come, dastard! let me find this man of terrors.

SCENE IV.

The back-scene opens, and discovers CORIOLANUS *as described above.*

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

TULLUS, *after some silence.*

Illustrious stranger—for thy high demeanour
Bespeaks thee such—who art thou?

CORIOLANUS.

[*Rising and unmuffling his face.*
View me, Tullus—
[*After some pause.*
Dost thou not know me?

TULLUS,

No. That noble front
I never saw before. What is thy name?

CORIOLANUS.

Does not the secret voice of hostile instinct,
Does not thy swelling heart declare me to thee?

TULLUS.

Gods! can it be?—

CORIOLANUS.

Yes. I am Caius Marcius;
Known to thy smarting country by the name
Of Coriolanus. That alone, is left me,
That empty name, for all my toils, my service,

The blood which I have shed for thankless Rome.
Behold me banish'd thence, a victim yielded
By her weak nobles to the maddening rabble.
I seek revenge. Thou may'st employ my sword,
With keener edge, with heavier force against her,
Than e'er it fell upon the Volscian nation.
But if thou, Tullus, dost refuse me this,
The only wish of my collected heart,
Where every passion in one burning point
Concenters, give me death: Death from thy hand
I sure have well deserv'd—Nor shall I blush
To take or life or death from Attius Tullus.

TULLUS.

O Caius Marcius! in this one short moment,
That we have friendly talk'd, my ravish'd heart
Has undergone a great, a wonderous change.
I ever held thee in my best esteem;
But this heroic confidence has won me,
Stampt me at once thy friend. I were indeed
A wretch as mean as this thy trust is noble,
Could I refuse thee thy demand—Yes, Marcius!
Thou hast thy wish! take half of my command,
If that be not enough, then take the whole.
We have, my friend, a gallant force on foot,
An army, Marcius, fit to follow thee.
Go lead them on, and take thy full revenge.
All should unite to punish the ungrateful;
Ingratitude is treason to mankind.

CORIOLANUS, *embracing him.*

Thus, generous Tullus, take a soldier's thanks,
Who is not practis'd in the gloss of words——
Thou friend in deed! friend to my cause, my quarrel!

Friend to the darling passion of my soul!
All else I set at nought!—Immortal gods!
I am new-made, and wonder at myself!
A little while ago, and I was nothing;
A powerless reptile, crawling on the earth,
Curs'd with a soul that restless wish'd to wield
The bolts of Jove! I dwelt in Erebus,
I wander'd thro' the hopeless gloom of hell,
Stung with revenge, tormented by the furies!
Now, Tullus, like a god, you draw me thence,
Throne me amidst the skies, with tempest charg'd,
And put the ready thunder in my hand!

TULLUS.

What I have promis'd, Marcius, I will do.
Within an hour at farthest we expect
The freedman of Galesus back from Rome,
Who carried to the senate our demands.
Their answer will, I doubt not, end the truce,
And instant draw our angry swords against them.
Till then retire within my inmost tent,
Unknown to all but me, that when our chiefs
Meet in full council to declare for war,
I may produce thee to their wondering eyes,
As if descended from avenging Heaven
To humble lofty Rome, and teach her justice.

CORIOLANUS.

To thy direction, Tullus, I resign
My future life: my fate is in thy hands;
And, if I judge aright, the fate of Rome.

ACT II. SCENE I.

GALESUS, TITUS.

GALESUS.

INDEED! my Titus, I had hopes that Rome,
Vext as she is with her domestic broils,
Her frontier weak, her armies unprepar'd,
Might have comply'd with our demands, and given us
The same alliance granted to the Latines.

TITUS.

The senate scarce would hear the terms I offer'd;
But order'd me to bear this answer back:
"If first the Volsci take up arms, the Romans
"Will be the last to lay them down."

GALESUS.

Alas!
This answer seals the doom of many a wretch.
Unchain'd Bellona from her temple rushes,
With all the crimes and vices in her train.
Earth fades at her approach. To rural peace,
Fair plenty, and the social joy of cities,
Soon will succeed rage, rapine, devastation,
Each cruel horror sanctify'd by names.
O mortals! mortals! when will you, content
With Nature's bounty, that in fuller flow,
Still as your labours open more it's sources,
Abundant gushes o'er the happy world;
When will you banish violence and outrage,
To dwell with beasts of prey in woods and deserts?

TITUS.

Never till Rome shall change her conquering maxims.

GALESUS.

Her haughty spirit now will soar beyond
Its usual pitch, upborne by Caius Marçius.
Stands he not for the consulate?

TITUS.

He did.
But is no more a citizen of Rome.

GALESUS.

What mean'st thou, Titus?

TITUS.

Marcius is from Rome
Banish'd for ever.

GALESUS.

O immortal Powers!
On what pretence could they to exile doom
Their wisest captain, and their bravest soldier?
Nor less renown'd for piety, for justice,
An uncorrupted heart, and purest manners.

TITUS.

The charge against him was entirely groundless,
What not his enemies themselves believ'd,
Affecting of tyrannic power in Rome.
His real crime was only some hot words,
Struck from his fiery temper, in the senate,
Against those factious ministers of discord,
The tribunes of the people. They to rage,
And frantic fury, rous'd the mad plebeians;
By whom supported in their bold attempt,

They durst presume to summon to the bar
Of an enrag'd and partial populace,
The most illustrious senator of Rome.
To this the nobles yielded—and, with his,
Gave up their own and children's rights for ever.

GALESUS.

O shameful weakness in a Roman senate,
So much renown'd for firmness! yet my Titus,
Spite of my love to Marcius, I must own it,
The vigorous soil whence his heroic virtues
Luxuriant rise, if not with careful hand
Severely weeded, teems with imperfections.
His lofty spirit brooks no opposition.
His rage, if once offended, knows no bounds.
He deems plebeians with patrican blood
Compar'd, the creatures of a lower species,
Mere menial hands by Nature meant to serve him.

TITUS.

It was this high patrician pride undid him.
The furious people triumph'd in his ruin
As if they had expell'd another Tarquin:
While, like a captive train, the vanquish'd nobles
Hung their dejected heads in silent shame.
Marcius alone seem'd unconcern'd; tho' deep
The latent tempest boil'd within his breast,
Choak'd up and smother'd with excessive rage.

GALESUS.

You were his guest at Rome, and therefore, Titus,
Might on this sad occasion be permitted
To join your tears with his domestic friends.
Saw you that moving scene?

TITUS.

I did, Galesus.
I follow'd Marcius home—His mother, there,
Veturia, the most venerable matron
These eyes have e'er beheld, and soft Volumnia,
His lovely virtuous wife amidst his children,
Spread on the ground, lay lost in dumb despair.
He swelling stood a while, and could not speak,
Th' affronted hero struggling with the man;
Then thus at last he broke the gloomy silence;
" 'Tis done. The guilty sentence is pronounc'd.
" Ungrateful Rome has cast me from her bosom.
" Support this blow with fortitude and courage,
" As it becomes two generous Roman matrons.
" I recommend my children to your care.
" Farewel. I go, I quit, without regret,
" A city grown an enemy to virtue."

GALESUS.

Oh godlike Marcius! oh unconquer'd strength
And dignity of mind! How much superior
Is such a soul to all the power of Fortune!

TITUS.

This said, he sternly try'd to break away:
When, holding in his hand his eldest son,
Veturia follow'd; while the poor Volumnia,
All drown'd in tears, and bearing in one arm
Their youngest, yet an infant, with the other
Hung clinging at his knees—he turning to them,
Half soften'd, half severe, breath'd from his soul
These broken accents—" Cease your vain complaints,
" Mother, you have no more a son; and thou,
" Thou best of women! thou, my dear Volumnia!
" No more a husband."—Pierc'd with these dire words

Volumnia lifeless sunk: and off he flung,
With wild precipitation.

GALESUS.

Thy sad tale
Blinds my old eyes with tears—But whither, tell me,
O whither, Titus, bent he then his course?

TITUS.

Where the blind genius of regardless rage
And desperation led. On to the gate
Capena call'd, attended by the nobles,
He stalk'd in sullen majesty along;
Nor deign'd a word. A godlike virtuous anger
Beam'd thro' his features, and sublim'd his air.
With downcast eyes he walk'd; or, if aside
He chanc'd to look, each look was great reproach.
Thus in emphatic silence, that made words
Void and insipid all, he parted from them,
The day preceding my return from Rome;
Nor has been heard of since, lost in th' abyss
Of his own woes.

GALESUS.

O Marcius, noble Marcius!
How shall my friendship succour thy distress?
Where shall I find thee to partake thy sorrows,
And make myself companion of thy exile?
But, Titus, we indulge discourse too long—
Go, and assemble thou the Volscian chiefs,
Whilst I repair to Tullus, to inform,
And bring him to the council, there to hear
The fatal answer thou hast brought from Rome.

SCENE II.

Changes to TULLUS's *Tent.*

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

CORIOLANUS.

Forgive me, Tullus, if I count the moments
That stop the purpose of thy noble kindness,
And keep me here confin'd in tame inaction.
Why lingers Titus?

TULLUS.

Calm thy restless heart,
Brave Marcius; every minute I expect him.
Soon from the cloud that hides thee, shalt thou break
With double brightness; soon thy fiery rage
Shall wither all the strength and pride of Rome.

CORIOLANUS.

O righteous Jove, protector of the injur'd!
If from my earliest youth, with pious awe,
I still have reverenc'd thy all-powerful justice,
Still by her sacred dictates rul'd my actions;
O let that justice now support my cause,
And arm my strong right-hand with all her terrors!
When that is done, be life or death my lot,
As thy almighty pleasure shall determine.

[*Enter an Officer to* Tullus.

OFFICER.

My lord, Galesus asks admittance to you.

TULLUS.

Marcius, retire an instant, till I hear
The business brings him hither—Bid him enter.

[*Exit* Officer *and* Coriolanus.

[*Enter* Galesus.

SCENE III.

TULLUS, GALESUS.

GALESUS.

Tullus, the Roman senate has return'd
No other answer, to our late demands,
But absolute denial and defiance.

TULLUS.

It is what I expected—We shall teach them
An humbler language soon—Hast thou assembled,
As I desir'd, the Volscian chiefs in council?

GALESUS.

Titus is gone to summon their attendance.

TULLUS.

It is enough, come forth, my noble guest!
And shew Galesus how the gods assist us.

SCENE IV.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS, GALESUS.

GALESUS.

O my astonish'd soul! what do I see?
What! Caius Marcius! Caius Marcius here,
Beneath one tent with Tullus!

TULLUS.

Ay, and more,
With Tullus, now his friend and fellow-soldier.
Yes, thou shalt see him thundering at the head
Of Volscian armies, he, who oft has carry'd
Destruction thro' their ranks—Your leave a moment,
While to our chiefs and fathers, I announce
Their unexpected guest.

SCENE V.

CORIOLANUS, GALESUS.

CORIOLANUS.

Thou good old man!
Close let me strain thee to my faithful heart,
Which now is doubly thine, united more
By the protection which thy country gives me,
Than by our former friendship.

GALESUS.

Strange event!
This is thy work, almighty Providence!
Whose power, beyond the stretch of human thought,
Revolves the orbs of empire; bids them sink
Deep in the deadning night of thy displeasure,
Or rise majestic o'er a wondering world.
The gods by thee—I see it, Coriolanus,—
Mean to exalt us, and depress the Romans.

CORIOLANUS.

Galesus, yes, the gods have sent me hither;
Those righteous gods, who, when vindictive justice
Excites them to destroy a worthless people,
Make their own crimes and follies strike the blow.

GALEAUS.

Cherish these thoughts that teach us what we are,
And tame the pride of man. There is a power
Unseen that rules th' illimitable world,
That guides its motions, from the brightest star,
To the least dust of this sin-tainted mold;
While man, who madly deems himself the lord
Of all, is nought but weakness and dependance.
This sacred truth, by sure experience taught,
Thou must have learnt, when, wandering all alone,
Each bird, each insect, flitting thro' the sky,
Was more sufficient for itself than thou——
Ah the full image of thy woes dissolves me!
The pangs that must have torn, at parting from thee,
Thy mother and thy wife. I cannot think
Of that sad scene, without some drops of pity!

CORIOLANUS.

Who was it forc'd me to that bitter parting?
Who, in one cruel, hasty moment, chas'd me
From wife, from children, friends, and household gods,
Me! who so often had protected theirs?
Who, from the sacred city of my fathers,
Drove me with Nature's commoners to dwell,
To lodge beneath their wide unsheltered roof,
And at their table feed? O blast me, gods!
With every woe! debility of mind,
Dishonour, just contempt, and palsy'd weakness,
If I forgive the villains! yes, Galeaus,
Yes, I will offer to the powers of vengeance
A great, a glorious victim—a whole city!——
Why, Tullus, this delay?

GALEAUS.

May Coriolanus
Be to the Volscian nation, and himself,

The dread, the godlike instrument of justice!
But let not rage and vengeance mix their rancour;
Let them not trouble with their fretful storm,
Their angry gleams, that azure, where enthron'd
The calm divinity of Justice sits,
And pities, while she punishes, mankind.

CORIOLANUS.

What saidst thou? What, against the Powers of vengeance?
The gods gave honest Anger, just Revenge,
To be the awful guardians of the rights
And native dignity of human kind.
O were it not for them, the saucy world
Would grow a noisome nest of little tyrants!
Each carrion crow, on eagle merit perch'd,
Would peck his eyes out, and the mongrel cur
At pleasure bait the lion—No, Galesus,
I would not rashly, nor on light occasion,
Receive the deep impression in my breast;
But when the base, the brutal and unjust,
Or worse than all, th' ungrateful, stamp it there;
O I will then, with luxury supreme,
Enjoy the pleasure of offended gods,
A righteous, just revenge!—Behold my soul.

[*Enter an* Officer.

OFFICER.

My lords, th' assembled chiefs desire your presence.

GALESUS.

Come, noble Marcius; let my joyful hand
Conduct thee thither—Doubt not thy reception
Will be proportion'd to thy fame and merit.

SCENE VI.

The back-scene opens, and discovers the deputies of the Volscian *States, assembled in council. They rise and salute* Coriolanus; *then resume their places.*

GALESUS, TULLUS, CORIOLANUS, SENATORS.

GALESUS.

Assembled states, and captains of the Volsci,
Behold the chief so much renown'd in war;
Our once so formidable foe, but now
Our proffer'd friend and soldier—Caius Marcius.

FIRST SENATOR.

We give him hearty welcome from our souls.

CORIOLANUS.

Most noble chiefs, and fathers of the Volsci,
I need not say, how by the people's rage,
And the poor weakness of the timid nobles,
I am expell'd from Rome. Had I confin'd
My wishes merely to a safe retreat,
Some Latine city might have given me that;
Or any nameless corner. What imports it,
Where a tame patient exile rots in silence!
But, Volscian lords, permit me to declare,
I would at once cut short my useless days,
Rather than be that despicable wretch,
Who neither can take vengeance on his foes,
Nor serve his friends. That is my temper, chiefs.
I shall be glad to merit, by my sword,
Th' asylum which I seek among the Volsci.

Rome is our common foe: Then let us join
Our common sufferings, passions, and resentments.
Yes, tho' but one, I bring so many wrongs,
So large a share of powerful enmity,
Into the war, as gives me the presumption,
To offer to the Volscian states th' alliance
Even of my single arm.——

TULLUS.

That single arm
Is in itself a numerous army, Marcius;
The Volscians so esteem it—But proceed.

CORIOLANUS.

I will not mention, Volscian chiefs, what talent
The world allows me to possess in war:
But be that what it will you may employ it.
Soldier, or captain, in whatever station
You place me, I will lose each drop of blood,
Or with this hand I'll fix the Volscian standard
On the proud towers of capitolian Jove.

TULLUS.

Chiefs of the Volscian league, I give you joy
Of our new citizen, the noble Marcius.
The genius of the Volscian state has sent him,
Whetted by wrongs into a keener hatred
Than that we bear to Rome. It were contemning,
With impious self-sufficient arrogance,
This bounty of the gods, not to accept,
With every mark of honour, of his service.
I, Volscians, I, even Attius Tullus, give,
First of you all, my voice, that Caius Marcius
Be now receiv'd to high command among us;

That instantly we do appoint him general
Of half our troops, which here, with your consent,
I to him yield.—Speak, chiefs, is this your pleasure?

FIRST SENATOR.

It is—We give unanimous consent,

TULLUS, *embracing him.*

Marcius, I joy to call thee my companion,
And colleague in this war.

CORIOLANUS.

By all the gods!
Thou art the generous victor of my soul!
Yes, Tullus, I am conquer'd by thy virtue.

GALESUS.

Tho' I have oft, on great occasions, Tullus,
Beheld thee in the senate, and the field,
Cover'd with glory; yet, I must avow,
I never saw thee shew such genuine greatness,
Such true sublimity of soul, as now.
To scorn th' all powerful charm of selfish passions,
Chiefly the dazzling pride of emulation,
That noble weakness of heroic minds,
To sink thyself that thou may'st raise thy country;
To put the sword into thy rival's hand,
And twine thy promis'd laurels round his brow—
O 'tis a flight beyond the highest point
Of martial glory! and what few can reach.
Go forth, ye chosen ministers of justice;
And may that awful Power, whose secret hand
Sways all our passions, turns our partial views,
All to its own dread purposes, attend you!

CORIOLANUS.

I burn to enter on the glorious task
You now have mark'd me out. How slow the time
To the warm soul, that, in the very instant
It forms, would execute, a great design.
'Tis my advice we march direct to Rome;
We cannot be too quick. Let the first dawn
See us in bright array before her walls.
Perhaps when they behold their exile there,
Back'd by your force, some conscious hearts among them
May feel th' alarm of guilt.

TULLUS.

I much approve
Of this advice. 'Tis what I thought before.
Ere strengthen'd, Marcius, by thy mighty arm;
But now 'tis doubly right. Here, Volscian chiefs,
Here let our council terminate—The troops
Have had repose sufficient. Strait to Rome
Come, let us urge our march—As yet the stars
Ride in their middle watch; we shall with ease
Reach it by dawn——

CORIOLANUS.

Yes, we have time—too much!
Six tedious hours till morn—But hence! away!
My soul on fire anticipates the dawn.

ACT III. SCENE I.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS, VOLUSIUS, TITUS, *with a crowd of* Volscian *officers. Acclamations behind the scenes.*

CORIOLANUS.

No more—I merit not this lavish praise.
True, we have driven the Roman legions back,
Defeated and disgrac'd—But what is this?
Nothing, ye Volsci, nothing yet is done.
We but begin the wondrous leaf of story,
That marks the Roman doom: At length it dawns,
The destin'd hour, that eases of their fears
The nations round, and sets Hesperia free.
Come on my brave companions of the war!
Come, let us finish at one mighty stroke
This toil of labouring fate.—We will, or perish!
While, noble Tullus, you protect the camp,
I, with my troops, all men of chosen valour,
And well approv'd to-day, will storm the city.

TITUS.

Beneath thy animating conduct, Marcius,
What can the Volscian valour not perform?
Thy very sight and voice subdues the Romans.
When, lifting up your helm, you shew'd your face,
That like a comet glar'd destruction on them,
I saw their bravest veterans fly before thee.
Their ancient spirit has with thee forsook them,
And ruin hangs o'er yon devoted walls.

[*Enter an* Officer, *who addresses himself to* Coriolanus.

OFFICER.

My lord, a herald is arriv'd from Rome,
To say, a deputation from the senate,
Attended by the ministers of Heaven,
A venerable train of priests and flamens,
Is on the way, address'd to you.

CORIOLANUS.

To me!
What can this message mean! Stand to your arms,
Ye Volscian troops; and let these Romans pass
Betwixt the lowering frown of double files.
What! do they think me such a milky boy,
To pay my vengeance with a few soft words.
Come, fellow soldiers, Tullus, come, and see,
If I betray the honours you have done me.

[*Goes out with a train of* Volscian *officers.*

SCENE II.

TULLUS, VOLUSIUS, *who remain.*

VOLUSIUS, *after some silence.*

Are we not, Tullus, failing in our duty
Not to attend our general?

TULLUS.

How! what saidst thou?

VOLUSIUS.

Methought, my lord, his parting orders were,
We should attend the triumph now preparing

O'er all his foes at once—Romans and Volsci!
Come, we shall give offence.

TULLUS.

Of this no more.
I pray thee spare thy bitter irony.

VOLUSIUS.

Shall I then speak without disguise?

TULLUS.

Speak out
With all the honest bluntness of a friend.
Think'st thou I fear the truth?

VOLUSIUS.

Then, Tullus, know,
Thou art no more the general of the Volsci.
Thou hast, by this thy generous weakness, sunk
Thyself into a private man of Antium.
Yes, thou hast taken from thy laurel'd brow
The well-earn'd trophies of thy toils and perils,
Thy springing hopes, the fairest ever budded,
And heap'd them on a man too proud before.

TULLUS.

He bears it high.

VOLUSIUS.

Death and perdition! high!
With uncontroul'd command!—You see, already,
He will not be incumber'd with the fetters
Of our advice. He speaks his sovereign will;
On every hand he issues out his orders,
As to his natural slaves.—For you, my lord,
He has, I think, confin'd you to your camp,

There in inglorious indolence, to languish;
While he, beneath your blasted eyes, shall reap
The harvest of your honour.

TULLUS.

No, Volusius,
Whatever honour shall by him be gain'd
Reverts to me, from whose superior bounty
He drew the means of all his glorious deeds.
This mighty chief, this conqueror of Rome,
Is but my creature.——

VOLUSIUS.

Wretched self-delusion;
He and the Volscians know he is thy master.
He acts as such in all things.—Now, by Mars,
Could my abhorrent soul endure the thought
Of stooping to a Roman chief, I here
Would leave thee in thy solitary camp,
And go where glory calls.

TULLUS.

Indeed, Volusius,
I did expect more equal treatment from him.
But what of that?—The generous pride of virtue
Disdains to weigh too nicely the returns
Her bounty meets with—Like the liberal gods,
From her own gracious nature she bestows,
Nor stoops to ask reward—Yet must I own,
I thought he would not have so soon forgot
What he so lately was, and what I am.

VOLUSIUS.

Gods! knew ye not his character before?
Did you not know his genius was to yours
Averse, as are antipathies in nature?

High, over-weening, tyrannously proud,
And only fit to hold command o'er slaves?
Hence, as repugnant to that equal life,
Which is the quickening soul of all republics,
The Roman people cast him forth; and we,
Shall we receive the bane of their repose,
Into our breast? Are we less free than they?
Or shall we be more patient of a tyrant?

TULLUS.

All this I knew. But while his imperfections
Are thy glad theme, thou hast forgot his virtues.

VOLUSIUS.

I leave that subject to the smooth Galesus,
And these his Volscian flatterers—His virtues!
Trust me there is no insolence that treads
So high as that which rears itself on virtue.

TULLUS.

Well, be it so—I meant, that even his vices
Should, on this great occasion, serve the Volsci.

VOLUSIUS.

Confusion! there it is! there lurks the sting
Of our dishonour! While this Marcius leads
The Roman armies, ours are driven before him.
Behold, he changes sides; when with him changes
The fortune of the war. Strait they grow Volsci
And we victorious Romans—Such no doubt,
Such is his secret boast—Ay, this vile brand
Success itself will fix for ever on us;
And, Tullus, thou, 'tis thou must answer for it.

TULLUS *aside.*

His words are daggers to my heart; I feel
Their truth, but am asham'd to own my folly.

VOLUSIUS.

O shame! O infamy! the thought consumes me,
It scalds my eyes with tears, to see a Roman
Borne on our shoulders to immortal fame;
Just in the happy moment that decided
The long dispute of ages, that for which
Our generous ancestors had toil'd and bled,
To see him then step in and steal our glory!
O that we first had perish'd all! A people,
Who cannot find in their own proper force
Their own protection, are not worth the saving!

TULLUS.

It must have way! I will no more suppress it—
Know then, my rough old friend, no less than thee
His conduct hurts me and upbraids my folly.
I wake as from a dream. What demon mov'd me?
What doating generosity? his woes,
Was it his woes! To see the brave reduc'd
To trust his mortal foe? perhaps, a little
That work'd within my bosom—But, Volusius,
That was not all—I will to thee confess
The weakness of my heart—Yes, it was pride,
The dazzling pride to see my rival-warrior,
The great Coriolanus, bend his soul,
His haughty soul, to sue for my protection.
Protection, said I? were it that alone,
I had been base to have refus'd him that,
To have refus'd him aught a gallant foe
Owes to a gallant foe.—But to exalt him
To the same level, nay, above myself;
To yield him the command of half my troops,
The choicest acting half—That, that was madness!
Was weak, was mean, unworthy of a man!——

VOLUSIUS.

I scorn to flatter thee—It was indeed.

TULLUS.

Curse on the slave Galæsus! soothing, he
Seiz'd the fond moment of infatuation,
And clinch'd the chains my generous folly forg'd.
How shall I from this labyrinth escape?
Must it then be! what cruel genius dooms me,
In war or peace to creep beneath his fortune?

VOLUSIUS.

That genius is thyself. If thou canst bear
The very thought of stooping to this Roman,
Thou from that moment art his vassal, Tullus;
By that thou dost acknowledge parent Nature
Has form'd him thy superior. But if fix'd
Upon the base of manly resolution,
Thou say'st—I will be free! I will command!
I and my country! then—O never doubt it—
We shall find means to crush this vain intruder!
Even I myself—this hand——
Nay, hear me, Tullus,
'Tis not yet come to that, that last resource.
I do not say we should employ the dagger,
While other, better means are in our power.

TULLUS.

No, my Volusius, Fortune will not drive us,
Or I am much deceiv'd, to that extreme:
We shall not want the strongest fairest plea,
To give a solemn sanction to his fate.
He will betray himself. Whate'er his rage

Of passion talks, a weakness for his country
Sticks in his soul, and he is still a Roman.
Soon shall we see him tempted to the brink
Of this sure precipice—Then down, at once,
Without remorse, we hurl him to perdition!
But hark! the trumpet calls us to a scene
I should detest, if not from hope we thence
May gather matter to mature our purpose.

SCENE III.

The back-scene opens, and discovers Coriolanus *sitting on his tribunal, attended by his lictors, and a crowd of* Volscian *officers. Files of troops drawn up on either hand. In the depth of the scene appear the deputies from the* Roman *senate,* M. Minucius, Posthumus Cominius, Sp. Lartius, P. Pinnarius, *and* Q. Sulpitius, *all consular senators, who had been his most zealous friends. And behind them march the priests, the sacrificers, the augurs, and the guardians of the sacred things, dress in their ceremonial habits. These advance slowly betwixt the files of soldiers, under arms. As* Tullus *enters,* Coriolanus *rising salutes him.*

CORIOLANUS.

Here, noble Tullus, sit, and judge my conduct;
Nor spare to check me, if I act amiss.

TULLUS.

Marcius, the Volscian fate is in thy hands.

[Coriolanus *is seated again, and* Tullus *places himself upon a tribunal on his left hand. Mean time the* Ro-

man *deputies advance up to* Coriolanus *and salute him, which he returns.*

CORIOLANUS.

What, Romans, from the generals of the Volsci
Is your demand ?

MINUCIUS.

O Coriolanus, Rome,
Nurse of thy tender years, thy parent-city,
Her senators, her people, priests, and augurs,
Her every order and degree, by us,
Thy ever-zealous, still-unshaken friends,
Sue in the most pathetic terms for peace.
And if in this constrain'd, we from our maxim,
Never to ask but give it, must depart;
It is some consolation, in the state
To which thou hast by thy superior valour
Reduc'd us that we ask it from a Roman.

CORIOLANUS.

I was a Roman once, and thought the name
Was not dishonour'd by me; but it pleas'd
Your lords, the mob of Rome, to take it from me;
Nor will I now receive it back again.

MINUCIUS.

The name thou mayst reject, but canst not throw
The duties from thee which that name imports;
Indissoluble duties, bound upon thee
By the strong hand of Nature, and confirm'd
By the dread sanction of all-ruling Jove.
Then hear thy country's supplicating voice;
By all those duties I conjure thee hear us.

CORIOLANUS.

Well—I will hear thee; speak, declare thy message.

MINUCIUS.

Give peace, give healing peace, to two brave nations,
Fatigu'd with war, and sick of cruel deeds!
To carry on destruction's easy trade,
Afflict mankind, and scourge the world with war,
Is what each wicked, each ambitious man,
Who lets his furious passions loose, may do:
But in the flattering torrent of success,
To check his rage, and drop th' avenging sword,
When a repenting people ask it of him,
That is the genuine bounty of a god.
Then urge no farther this your just resentment;
Which, injur'd as you are, you needs must feel,
But never ought to carry into action,
Against your sacred country; whence you drew
Your life, your virtues, every mortal good,
That very valour you employ against her.
Stop, Coriolanus, ere, beyond retreat,
You plunge yourself in crimes. To the fierce joy
Of vengeance push'd to barbarous excess,
Repentance will succeed, and sickning horror.
Consider too the slippery state of fortune.
The gods take pleasure oft, when haughty mortals
On their own pride erect a mighty fabric,
By slightest means, to lay their towering schemes
Low in the dust, and teach them they are nothing.
Return, thou virtuous Roman! to the bosom
Of thy imploring country. Lo! her arms
She fondly spreads to take thee back again,
And by redoubled love efface her harshness.
Return, and crown thee with the noblest wreath
Which glory can bestow—the palm of mercy!

CORIOLANUS.

Marcus Minucius, and ye other Romans,
Respected senators, and holy flamens,
Attend, and take to your demand this answer:
Why court you me, the servant of the Volsci?
It is to them that you must bend for peace,
Which on these only terms they will accord you.
" Restore the conquer'd lands, your former wars
" Have ravish'd from them: from their towns and cities,
" Won by your arms, withdraw your colonies;
" And to the full immunities of Rome
" Frankly admit them, as you have the Latines."
Then Romans, ye have peace, and not till then!
If these are terms which suit not your ambition,
They suit the state to which the Volscian arms
Have now reduc'd you—We have learn'd from Rome
To use our fortune, and command the vanquish'd.

TULLUS *aside.*

Death to my hopes! I'm now his slave for ever.

CORIOLANUS, *addressing himself to the* Volsci.

This, my illustrious patrons and protectors,
Volsci, to you I ow'd. Permit me now
To do myself and injur'd honour justice.

[*Turning again to the* Romans.

As to the liberty you idly vaunt
To give me of returning to your city,
'Tis what I hold unworthy of acceptance.
Can I return into th' ungrateful bosom
Of a distracted state, where to the rage
Of a vile senseless populace, the laws
Are by your shameful weakness given a prey?

Who are the men that hold the sway among you?
And whom have you expell'd as even unworthy
To live within the cincture of your walls!—
O the wild thought breaks in and troubles reason!—
With what, ye Romans, can the sourest censor,
The most envenom'd malice, justly charge me?
Did I e'er break your laws? Nay, did I e'er
Do aught that could disturb the sacred order,
The peace and social harmony of life;
Or taint your ancient sanctity of manners?
What was my crime? I could not bear to see
Your dignity debas'd, to see the rabble
Tread on the reverend grey authority
Of senatorial wisdom: Yes, for you,
In your defence I did enrage this monster;
And yet you basely left me to its fury.
Then talk no more of services and friendship:
A friend, who can, and does not shield, betrays me.
Or if the power was wanting, then your senate
Is sunk into servility and bondage,
Nor should a freeman deign to sit among you.

MINUCIUS.

The wisest are sometimes compell'd to yield
To popular storms: yet I defend not, Marcius,
Our timid conduct; we have felt our error,
And now invite thee back to aid the senate,
With thy heroic spirit to restrain
The giddy rage of faction, and to hold
The reins of government more firm hereafter.
As to th' appeal which thou hast nobly made
In vindication of thy spotless fame,
With pleasure we confirm it, and bear witness
To all thy public and thy private virtues:
But let us also beg thee not to stain

So far my public character demands;
So far my honour.—Now, what should forbid
The man, and friend, to be indulg'd a little?
Permit me to embrace thee, good Minucius,
Thee, Lartius; you, Pinnarius and Sulpitius:
But chiefly thee, Cominius, who first rais'd me
To deeds of arms: who from thy consular brow
Took thy own crown, and with it circled mine.
Tho' nought can shake my purpose, yet I wish
That Rome had sent me others on this errand.
I thank you for your friendship. The protection,
Which you have given to those, whom once I call'd
By tender names, I would not now remember.
How shall I—say—return your generous goodness?
O, there is nothing you, as friends, can ask,
My grateful heart will not with pleasure grant you.

COMINIUS.

We thank thee, Coriolanus—But a Roman
Disdains that favour you refuse his country.

CORIOLANUS.

[*To the* Volscian *officers.*
See that they be, with due regard and safety,
Conducted back.
[*To the* Roman *senators.*
I will suspend th' assault,
Till to these terms, of which we will not bate
The smallest part, your senate may have time
To send their latest answer. Then we cut
All further treaty off. Romans, farewel.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

TULLUS *alone.*

WHAT is the mind of man? A restless scene
Of vanity and weakness; shifting still,
As shift the lights of our uncertain knowledge;
Or as the various gale of passion breathes.
None ever thought himself more deeply founded
On what is right, nor felt a nobler ardor,
Than I, when I invested Caius Marcius
With this ill-judg'd command. Now it appears
Distraction, folly, monstrous folly! meanness!
And down I plunge, betray'd even by my virtue,
From gulph to gulph, from shame to deeper shame.

SCENE II.

TULLUS, GALESUS.

GALESUS.

I listen'd Tullus, to th' important scene
That lately pass'd before us, with most strict
Unprejudic'd attention; and have since
Revolv'd it in my mind, both as a man,
Ally'd to all mankind, and as a Volscian.
Indeed our terms are high, and by the manner
In which they were prescrib'd by Coriolanus,
Are what we cannot hope will e'er be granted.
They should be soften'd. Let us yield a little,

Conscious ourselves to a great nation's pride,
The pride of human nature. Could the Romans,
Stoop to such peace, commanded by the sword
They then were slaves, unworthy our alliance.

TULLUS.

Gods! do I hear in thee, one of the chiefs
Intrusted with the honour of the Volsci,
An advocate for Rome?

GALESUS.

I glory, Tullus,
To own myself an advocate for peace.
Peace is the happy natural state of man;
War his corruption, his disgrace—

TULLUS.

His safeguard!
His pride! his glory!—What but war, just war,
Gave Greece her heroes? Those who drew the sword
(As we do now) against the sons of rapine;
To quell proud tyrants, and to free mankind.

GALESUS.

Yes, Tullus, when to just defence the warrior
Confines his force, he is a worship'd name,
Dear to mankind, the first and best of mortals!
Yet still if this can by soft means be done,
And fair accommodation, that is better.
Why should we purchase with the blood of thousands,
What may be gain'd by mutual just concession?
Why give up peace, the best of human blessings,
For the vain cruel pride of useless conquest?

TULLUS.

These soothing dreams of philosophic quiet
Are only fit for unfrequented shades.

The sage should quit the busy bustling world,
Ill suited to his gentle meditations,
And in some desart find that peace he loves.

GALESUS.

Mistaken man! Philosophy consists not
In airy schemes, or idle speculations:
The rule and conduct of all social life
Is her great province. Not in lonely cells
Obscure she lurks, but holds her heavenly light
To senates and to kings to guide their councils,
And teach them to reform and bless mankind.
All policy but hers is false and rotten;
All valour not conducted by her precepts
Is a destroying fury sent from hell
To plague unhappy man, and ruin nations.

TULLUS.

To stop the waste of that destroying fury
Is the great cause and purpose of this war.
Art thou a friend to peace?—subdue the Romans.
Who, who, but they have turn'd this ancient land,
Where, from Saturnian times, harmonious concord
Still lov'd to dwell, into a scene of blood,
Of endless discord, and perpetual rapine?
The sword, the vengeful sword, must drain away
This boiling blood, that thus disturbs the nations!
Talk not of terms. It is a vain attempt
To bind th' ambitious and unjust by treaties:
These they elude a thousand specious ways;
Or if they cannot find a fair pretext,
They blush not in the face of Heaven to break them.

GALESUS.

Why then affronted Heaven will combat for us.
Set justice on our side, and then my voice

Shall be as loud for war as thine; my sword
Shall strike as deep, at least my blood shall flow
As freely, Tullus, in my country's cause.
But as I then would die to serve the Volscians,
So now I dare to serve them by opposing,
Even with my single voice, th' impetuous torrent
That hurries us away beyond the bounds
Of temperate wisdom; and presume to tell thee,
It is thy passion, not thy prudence, dictates
This haughty language.

TULLUS.

Yes, it is my passion,
A passion for the glory of my country,
That scorns your narrow views of timid prudence.
Our injur'd honour drew our swords, and never
Shall they be sheath'd while I command the Volscians,
Till Rome submits to Antium.

GALESUS.

Rome will perish
Ere she submit; and she has still her walls,
The strength of her allies, her native valour,
Which oft hath sav d her in the worst extremes,
And, stronger yet than all, despair, to aid her.

TULLUS.

All these will nought avail her, if our fears
Come not to her assistance—But, Galesus,
Why urge you this to me? Go, talk to Marcius.
The war has given him all his pride could hope for,
To see Rome's senate humbled at his feet:
He now may wish to reign in peace at Antium,
And thou, perhaps, art come an envoy from him,
To learn if I shall prove a quiet subject.

GALESUS.

Thro' this unguarded opening of thy soul,
I see what stings thee—Ah! beware of envy!
If that pale fury seize thee, thou art lost!
Tullus, 'tis easier far, from the clear breast,
To keep out treacherous vice, than to expel it.
Farewel. Remember I have done my duty.

[*Goes out.*

TULLUS *alone.*

This man discerns my heart—Well: What of that?
Am I afraid its movements should be seen?
I, whose clear thoughts have never shunn'd the light,
Must I now seek to hide them? O misfortune!
To have reduc'd myself to such a state,
So much beneath the greatness of my soul,
That, like a coward, I must learn to practise
The wretched arts of vile dissimulation!
By Heaven, I will not do it—I will not stoop
To veil my discontent a moment longer.
But see! my rival comes, the happy Marcius.
His haughty mien, his very looks, affront me.

SCENE III.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

CORIOLANUS.

Tullus, I have receiv'd intelligence,
That a strong body of the Latine troops
Is in full march to raise the siege of Rome.
Another day will bring them to its aid.
But go thou forth, and lead the valiant bands,
By thee commanded, to repel these succours.
Go, and cut off from Rome its last resource.

TULLUS.

I lead my troops from the great scene of action,
From falling Rome, which ere to-morrow's sun
Shall set, may be our prey! sure you forget
My rank and station—I disdain the service:
Give it to some you may command. For me,
I own no master but the Volscian states.
Rome is my object. I from Antium brought
The noblest army ever shook her walls.
And shall I now, on that decisive day,
Doom'd by the gods to lay her pride in ashes,
Shall I be absent from the glorious work?
It is the highest outrage even to think it.—
Just gods! dost thou presume to give thy orders
To me? to me! thy equal in command?
Nay, thy superior? was it not my hand,
My lavish hand, bestow'd thy power upon thee?
And know, proud Roman, that the man who gave it,
Can at his will resume it.

CORIOLANUS.

I propos'd
This expedition to thee as thy friend,
Not as thy general, Tullus. We are both
Commanders here; and for my share of pow'r,
Whene'er the council of the Volscian states,
Who cloth'd me with it, shall again demand it,
I at their feet will lay it down, persuaded,
The canker'd tongue of Envy's self must own,
That by my service I have well deserv'd it.

TULLUS.

Was it to them, or me, you hither came
To crave protection? Was not then your fortune,
Your liberty, your life, at my disposal?

I rais'd you from the dust, a wretched exile,
An outcast, helpless, friendless, driven to beg,
The lowest refuge which despair can seek,
Shelter amidst thy foes. My pitying goodness
Protected, trusted, and believ'd you grateful.
O ill-plac'd confidence!

CORIOLANUS.

Immortal gods!
Hear I these words from Tullus!

TULLUS.

What for all this
Is thy return? Pride; self-sufficiency;
Councils apart from mine; despotic orders;
The glory of the war all pilfer'd from me:
And, to complete the whole, a Latine army
Now conjur'd up to draw me from the siege;
Till by cajoling our tame chiefs, and dazzling
The senseless eyes of the low mob of soldiers,
Thou shalt be solely seated in the power
Which, thank my folly! now is shar'd betwixt us.

CORIOLANUS.

O indignation!—Down, thou swelling heart—
I will be calm—I will.—Thou dost accuse me
Of the worst vice that can debase mankind,
Of black ingratitude. On what foundations?
What have I done to merit such a charge?
Is it my fault, if in the Volscian army
My name is as rever'd and great as thine?
Can I forbid authority, and fame,
To follow merit and success?—You knew
The man whom you employ'd, and should have known
He would not be a cypher in employment.

TULLUS.

Think'st thou my heart can better brook than thine
To be that cypher; that dishonour'd tool!
Subservient to th'ambition of another?
Gods! I had rather live a drudging peasant
Unknown to glory, in some Alpin village,
Than at the head of these victorious legions
Bear the high name of chief, without the power.
No, Marcius, no. I will command indeed:
And thou shalt learn, with all the Volscian army,
To treat their general with respect.

CORIOLANUS.

Respect!
O Tullus! Tullus! by the Powers divine!
I bore thee once respect, as high as man
Can shew to man. From thee, my foe, my rival,
I nor disdain'd nor fear'd to ask protection.
You gave me all I ask'd, you gave me more,
With noble warmth of heart! which to esteem,
Added the ties of gratitude and friendship.
Whatever since, in council or in arms,
Has been by me atchiev'd, was done for thee.
My glory all was thine. The palms I gain'd
Only compos'd a garland for his brow,
Who rais'd this banish'd man to tread on Rome.

TULLUS.

To tread on him who rais'd him—That, I know,
Is thy ambitious purpose: but be certain,
However Rome may bend beneath thy fortune,
Thou shalt not find an easy conquest here.

CORIOLANUS.

May Jove with lightning strike me to the centre,
If from the day I saw thy face at Antium,

My heart has ever form'd one secret thought
To hurt thy honour, or depress thy greatness;
I was thy friend, thy soldier, and thy servant.
But now I will as openly avow,
Thy jealousy has, with envenom'd breath,
Made such a sudden ravage in our friendship,
I know not what to think.——

TULLUS.

Think me thy foe.
There is no lasting friendship with the proud.

CORIOLANUS.

Nor with the jealous——But of this enough.
Come let us turn our fire a nobler way:
We have a worthier quarrel to pursue.——
It were unjust, dishonourable, base,
Our pride should hurt the Volscian cause.

TULLUS.

No, Marcius,
I mean to guard it better for the future:
The Volscian cause is safest with a Volscian.
I therefore claim, insist upon my right;
That you shall yield me my command in turn.
The first attack was yours: 'Tis scanty justice,
The second should be mine.

CORIOLANUS.

Tullus, 'tis yours.
O it imports not which of us command!
Give me the lowest rank among your troops:
All Italy will know, the voice of fame
Will tell all future times, that I was present;
That Coriolanus in the Volscian army
Assisted, when imperial Rome was sack'd;

That city which, while he maintain'd her cause,
Invincible herself, made Antium tremble.

TULLUS.

What arrogant presumption!

SCENE IV.

To them VOLUSIUS *entering hastily.*

TULLUS.

Ha! Volusius,
Thy looks declare some meſſage of importance.

VOLUSIUS.

Tullus, they do—I was to find thee, Marcius.
To thee a second deputation comes,
Thy mother, and thy wife, with a long train
Of all the noblest ladies Rome can boast,
In mourning habits clad, approach our camp,
Preceded by a herald, to demand
Another audience of thee.

CORIOLANUS.

How, Volusius!
Said you, the Roman ladies! Low, indeed,
Must be the state of Rome, when thus her matrons
She sends amidst the tumults of a camp,
To beg protection for the men, who lie
Trembling behind their ramparts—come! once more!
And see me put an end to prayers and treaty!

SCENE V.

TULLUS, VOLUSIUS.

VOLUSIUS.

Tullus, 'tis well. This answers to my wishes.

TULLUS.

How? What is well? That humbled Rome once more
Shall deck him with the trophies of our arms?

VOLUSIUS.

And hop'st thou nothing from this blest event?
They who have often blasted mighty heroes,
Who oft have stol'n into the firmest hearts,
And melted them to folly; they, my friend,
Will do what wisdom never could effect.

TULLUS.

Think'st thou the prayers and tears of wailing women
Can shake the man, who with such cold disdain
Stood firm against those venerable consuls,
And spurn'd the genius of his kneeling country?

VOLUSIUS.

It was his pride alone that made him ours.
That passion kept him firm; the flattering charm
Of humbling those, who in their persons bore
The whole collected majesty of Rome.
These women are no proper objects for it:
He cannot triumph o'er his wife and mother.
On this my hopes are founded, that these women
May by their gentler influence subdue him.

TULLUS.

Whate'er th' event, he shall no longer here,
As wave his passions, dictate peace or war.
Whether his stubborn soul maintains its firmness,
Or yields to female prayers, the Volscian honour
Will be alike betray'd. If Rome prevails,
He stops our conquering arms from her destruction;
If he rejects her suit, he reigns our tyrant.
But, by th' immortal gods! his short liv'd empire
Shall never see yon radiant sun descend.

VOLUSIUS.

Blest be those gods that have at last inspir'd thee
With resolution equal to thy cause,
The cause of liberty!

TULLUS.

Be sure, Volusius,
If that should happen which thy hopes portend;
Should he, by Nature tam'd, disarm'd by love,
Respite the Roman doom—he seals his own:
By Heaven! he dies.

VOLUSIUS.

Let me embrace thee, Tullus!
Now breaking from the cloud, which, like the sun,
Thy own too bounteous beams had drawn around thee.

TULLUS.

You was deceiv'd, my friend, when I with tameness,
With tameness which astonish'd thy brave spirit,
Seem'd to submit to that unequal sway
He arrogated o'er me; know, my heart
Ne'er swell'd so high as in that cruel moment.
My indignation, like th' imprison'd fire
Pent in the troubled breast of glowing Ætna,

Burnt deep and silent: but, collected now,
It shall beneath its fury bury Marcius!
'Tis fixt. Our tyrant dies.

VOLUSIUS.

Tullus, my sword
Here claims to be employ'd.—Nor mine alone—
There are some worthy Volsci still remaining,
Who think with us, and pine beneath the laurels
A Roman chief bestows.

TULLUS.

Go find them strait,
And bring them to the space before his tent;
'Tis there he will receive this deputation.
Then if he sinks beneath these women's prayers—
Or if he does not—But, Volusius, wait,
I give thee strictest charge to wait my signal.
Perhaps I may find means to free the Volsci
Without his blood. If not—we will be free.

ACT V. SCENE I.

Trumpets sounding.

The scene discovers the camp, a crowd of Volscian *officers with files of soldiers drawn up as before. Enter* Coriolanus, Tullus, Galesus, Volusius. *The* Roman *ladies advance slowly from the depth of the stage, with* Veturia *the mother of* Coriolanus, *and* Volumnia *his wife, at their head, all clad in habits of mourning;* Coriolanus *stands at the head of the* Volsci, *surrounded by his lictors; but when he perceives his mother and wife, after some struggle, he advances, and goes hastily to embrace them.*

CORIOLANUS *advancing.*

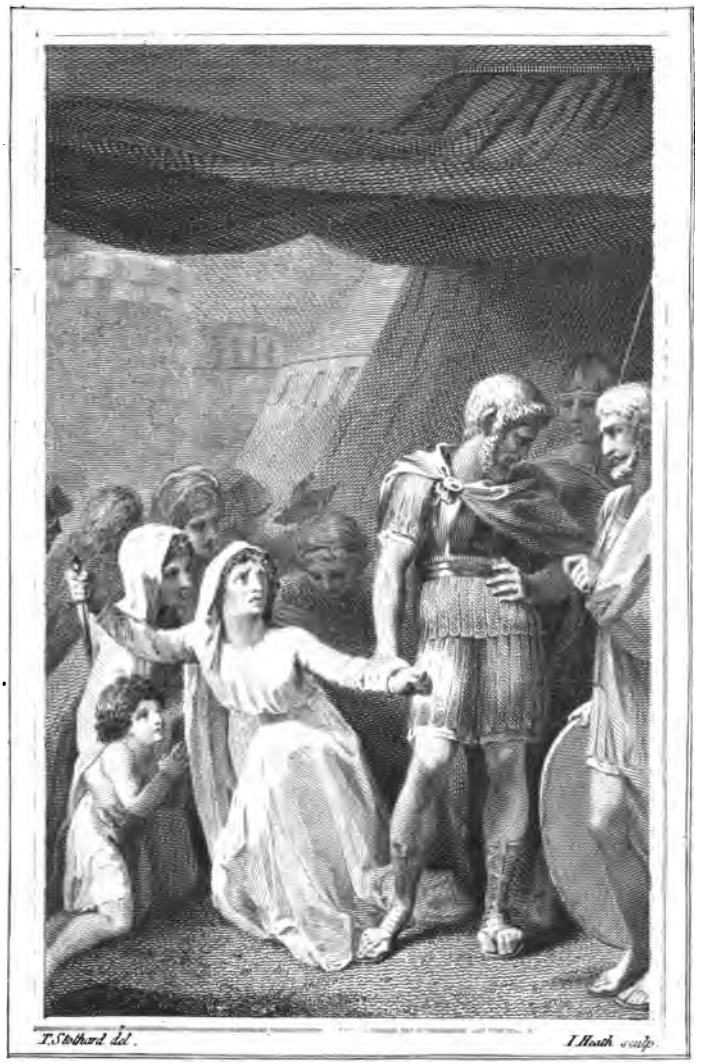
LOWER your fasces, lictors——
Oh Veturia!
Thou best of parents!

VETURIA.

Coriolanus, stop.
Whom am I to embrace? A son, or foe?
Say, in what light am I regarded here?
Thy mother, or thy captive?

CORIOLANUS.

Justly, Madam,
You check my fondness, that by nature hurry'd,
Forgot I was the general of the Volsci,
And you a deputy from hostile Rome.
[*He goes back to his former station.*
I hear you with respect. Speak your commission.



T. Stothard del. J. Heath sculp.

CORIOLANUS.

Act V. Scene 1st

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VETURIA.

Think not I come a deputy from Rome,
Rome, once rejected, scorns a second suit.
You have already heard whate'er the tongue
Of eloquence can plead, whate'er the wisdom
Of sacred age, the dignity of senates,
And virtue can enforce. Behold me here,
Sent by the shades of your immortal fathers,
Sent by the genius of the Marcian line,
Commission'd by my own maternal heart,
To try the soft, yet stronger powers of Nature.
Thus authoris'd, I ask, nay, claim a peace,
On equal, fair, and honourable terms,
To thee, to Rome, and to the Volscian people.
Grant it, my son! Thy mother begs it of thee!
Thy wife, the best, the kindest of her sex,
And these illustrious matrons, who have sooth'd
The gloomy hours thou hast been absent from us.
We, by whate'er is great and good in nature,
By every duty, by the gods, conjure thee!
To grant us peace, and turn on other foes
Thy arms, where thou may'st purchase virtuous glory.

CORIOLANUS.

I should, Veturia, break those holy bonds
That hold the wide republic of mankind,
Society, together; I should grow,
A wretch, unworthy to be call'd thy son;
I should, with my Volumnia's fair esteem,
Forfeit her love; these matrons would despise me—
Could I betray the Volscian cause, thus trusted,
Thus recommended to me—No, my mother,
You cannot sure, you cannot ask it of me!

VETURIA.

And does my son so little know me? me!
Who took such care to form his tender years,
Left to my conduct by his dying father?
Have I so ill deserv'd that trust? alas!
Am I so low in thy esteem, that thou
Should e'er imagine I could urge a part
Which in the least might stain the Marcian honour?
No, let me perish rather! perish all!
Life has no charms compar'd with spotless glory!
I only ask, thou would'st forbid thy troops
To waste our lands, and to assault yon city,
Till time be given for mild and righteous measures.
Grant us but one year's truce: mean while thou may'st
With honour and advantage to both nations,
Between us mediate a perpetual peace.

CORIOLANUS.

Alas! my mother! that were granting all.

VETURIA.

Canst thou refuse me such a just petition,
The first request thy mother ever made thee?
Canst thou to her intreaties, prayers, and tears,
Prefer a savage, obstinate revenge?
Have love and nature lost all power within thee?

CORIOLANUS

No,—in my heart they reign as strong as ever.
Come, I conjure you, quit ungrateful Rome,
Come, and complete my happiness at Antium,
You, and my dear Volumnia—There, Veturia,
There shall you see with what respect the Volsci
Will treat the wife and mother of their general.

VETURIA.

Treat me thyself with more respect, my son;
Nor dare to shock my ears with such proposals.
Shall I desert my country, I who come
To plead her cause? Ah no! A grave in Rome
Would better please me, than a throne at Antium.
How hast thou thus forsaken all my precepts?
How hast thou thus forgot thy love to Rome?
O Coriolanus, when with hostile arms,
With fire and sword, you enter'd on our borders,
Did not the fostering air, that breathes around us,
Allay thy guilty fury, and instil
A certain native sweetness thro' thy soul?
Did not your heart thus murmur to itself?
" These walls contain whatever can command
" Respect from virtue, or is dear to nature,
" The monuments of piety and valour,
" The sculptur'd forms, the trophies of my fathers,
" My household gods, my mother, wife, and children!"

CORIOLANUS.

Ah! you seduce me with too tender views!—
These walls contain the most corrupt of men,
A base seditious herd; who trample order,
Distinction, justice, laws, beneath their feet,
Insolent foes to worth, the foes of virtue!

VETURIA.

Thou hast not thence a right to lift thy hand
Against the whole community, which forms
Thy ever-sacred country—That consists
Not of coeval citizens alone:
It knows no bounds: it has a retrospect
To ages past; it looks on those to come;
And grasps of all the general worth and virtue.

Suppose, my son, that I to thee had been
A harsh obdurate parent, even unjust:
How would the monstrous thought with horror strike thee,
Of plunging, from revenge, thy raging steel
Into her breast who nurst thy infant years!—

CORIOLANUS.

Rome is no more! that Rome which nurs'd my youth:
That Rome, conducted by Patrician virtue,
She is no more! My sword shall now chastise
These sons of pride and dirt! Her upstart tyrants!
Who have debas'd the noblest state on earth
Into a sordid democratic faction.
Why will my mother join her cause to theirs?

VETURIA.

Forbid it, Jove! that I should e'er distinguish
My interest from the general cause of Rome;
Or live to see a foreign hostile arm
Reform th' abuses of our land of freedom.
[*Pausing.*
But 'tis in vain, I find, to reason more.
Is there no way to reach thy filial heart,
Once fam'd as much for piety as courage?
Oft hast thou justly triumph'd, Coriolanus;
Now yield one triumph to thy widow'd mother;
And send me back amidst the loud acclaims,
The grateful transports of deliver'd Rome,
The happiest far, the most renown'd of women!

CORIOLANUS.

Why, why, Veturia, wilt thou plead in vain?

TULLUS, *aside to* VOLUSIUS.

See, see, Volusius, how the strong emotions
Of powerful nature shake his inmost soul!

See how they tear him.—If he long resists them,
He is a god, or something worse than man.

VETURIA.

O Marcius, Marcius! canst thou treat me thus?
Canst thou complain of Rome's ingratitude,
Yet be to me so cruelly ungrateful?
To me! who anxious rear'd thy youth to glory?
Whose only joy, these many years, has been,
To boast that Coriolanus was my son?
And dost thou then renounce me for thy mother?
Spurn me before these chiefs, before those soldiers,
That weep thy stubborn cruelty? Art thou
The hardest man to me in this assembly?
Look at me! Speak!

[*Pausing, during which he appears in great agitation.*

Still dost thou turn away?
Inexorable? silent?—Then, behold me,
Behold thy mother, at whose feet thou oft
Hast kneel'd with fondness, kneeling now at thine,
Wetting thy stern tribunal with her tears.

CORIOLANUS. [*Raises her.*

Veturia, rise. I cannot see thee thus.
It is a sight uncomely, to behold
My mother at my feet, and that to urge
A suit, relentless honour must refuse.

VOLUMNIA. [*Advancing.*

Since, Coriolanus, thou dost still retain,
In spite of all thy mother now has pleaded,
Thy dreadful purpose, ah! how much in vain
Were it for me to join my supplications!
The voice of thy Volumnia, once so pleasing;
How shall it hope to touch the husband's heart,

When proof against the tears of such a parent?
I dare not urge what to thy mother thou
So firmly hast deny'd——But I must weep——
Must weep, if not thy harsh severity,
At least thy situation. O permit me
[*Taking his hand.*
To shed my gushing tears upon thy hand!
To press it with the cordia. lips of love!
And take my last farewel!

CORIOLANUS.

Yet, yet, my soul,
Be firm, and persevere——

VOLUMNIA.

Ah Coriolanus!
Is then this hand, this hand to be devoted,
The pledge of nuptial love, that has so long
Protected, bless'd, and shelter'd us with kindness,
Now lifted up against us? Yet I love it,
And, with submissive veneration, bow
Beneath th' affliction which it heaps upon us.
But O! what nobler transports would it give thee!
What joy beyond expression! couldst thou once
Surmount the furious storm of fierce revenge,
And yield ye to the charms of love and mercy.
Oh make the glorious trial!

CORIOLANUS.

Mother! wife!
Are all the powers of Nature leagu'd against me?
I cannot! will not—Leave me, my Volumnia!

VOLUMNIA.

Well, I obey—How bitter thus to part!
Upon such terms to part! perhaps for ever!——

But tell me, ere I hence unroot my feet,
When to my lonely home I shall return,
What from their father, to our little slaves,
Unconscious of the shame to which you doom them,
What shall I say?

[*Pausing: He highly agitated.*

Nay, tell me, Coriolanus!

CORIOLANUS.

Tell thee! What shall I tell thee? See these tears!
These tears will tell thee what exceeds the power
Of words to speak, whate'er the son, the husband,
And father, in one complicated pang,
Can feel—But leave me;—even in pity leave!
Cease, cease to torture me, my dear Volumnia!
You only tear my heart; but cannot shake it;
For by th' immortal gods, the dread avengers
Of broken faith!——

VOLUMNIA. [*Kneeling.*

Oh swear not, Coriolanus!
O vow not our destruction!

VETURIA.

Daughter rise.
Let us no more before the Volscian people
Expose ourselves a spectacle of shame.
It is in vain we try to melt a breast,
That to the best affections Nature gives us,
Prefers the worst—Hear me proud man! I have
A heart as stout as thine. I came not hither,
To be sent back rejected, baffled, sham'd,
Hateful to Rome, because I am thy mother:
A Roman matron knows, in such extremes,
What part to take—And thus I came provided.

[*Drawing from under her robe a dagger.*

Go! barbarous son! go! double parricide!
Rush o'er my corse to thy belov'd revenge!
Tread on the bleeding breast of her, to whom
Thou ow'st thy life!—Lo, thy first victim!

CORIOLANUS.

Ha! [*Seizing her hand.*
What dost thou mean?

VETURIA.

To die, while Rome is free,
To seize the moment ere thou art her tyrant.

CORIOLANUS.

O use thy power more justly! Set not thus
My treacherous heart in arms against my reason.
Here! here! thy dagger will be well employ'd;
Strike here! and reconcile my fighting duties.

VETURIA.

Off! Set me free!—Think'st thou that grasp, which binds
My feeble hand, can fetter too my will?
No, my proud son! Thou canst not make me live,
If Rome must fall!—No power on earth can do it!

CORIOLANUS.

Pity me, generous Volsci!—You are men—
Must it then be?—Confusion!—Do I yield?
What is it? Is it weakness? Is it virtue?—
Well!—

VETURIA.

What? Speak!

CORIOLANUS.

O, no!—my stifled words refuse
A passage to the throes that wring my heart.

VETURIA.

Nay, if thou yieldest, yield like Coriolanus;
And what thou do'st, do nobly!

CORIOLANUS. [*Quitting her hand.*

There!—'Tis done!—
Thine is the triumph, Nature!

[*To* Veturia, *in a low tone of voice.*

Ah Veturia!
Rome by thy aid is sav'd—but thy son lost.

VETURIA.

He never can be lost, who saves his country.

CORIOLANUS. [*Turning to the* Roman *Ladies.*

Ye matrons, guardians of the Roman safety,
You to the senate may report this answer.
We grant the truce you ask. But on these terms:
That Rome, mean-time, shall to a peace agree,
Fair, equal, just, and such as may secure
The safety, rights, and honour of the Volsci.

[*To the troops.*

Volsci, we raise the siege. Go, and prepare,
By the first dawn, for your return to Antium.

[*As the troops retire, and* Coriolanus *turns to the* Roman *Ladies;*

TULLUS. [*To* Volusius, *aside.*

'Tis as we wish'd, Volusius—To your station.
But mark me well—Till thou shalt hear my call,
I charge thee not to stir. One offer more
My honour bids me make to this proud man,
Before we strike the blow—If he rejects it,
His blood be on his head.

VOLUSIUS.

Well! I obey you.

[*He goes out.*

CORIOLANUS,

Be it thy care, Galesus, that a safeguard
Attend these noble matrons back to Rome.

SCENE II.

CORIOLANUS, TULLUS.

CORIOLANUS.

I plainly, Tullus, by your looks discern
You disapprove my conduct.

TULLUS.

Caius Marcius,
I mean not to assail thee with the clamour
Of loud reproaches, and the war of words;
But, pride apart, and all that can pervert
The light of steady reason, here to make
A candid fair proposal.

CORIOLANUS.

Speak. I hear thee.

TULLUS.

I need not tell thee, that I have perform'd
My utmost promise. Thou hast been protected;
Hast had thy amplest, most ambitious wish:
Thy wounded pride is heal'd, thy dear revenge
Completely sated; and, to crown thy fortune,
At the same time, thy peace with Rome restor'd.

Thou art no more a Volscian, but a Roman.
Return, return; thy duty calls upon thee,
Still to protect the city thou hast sav'd:
It still may be in danger from our arms.

CORIOLANUS.

Insolent man! Is this thy fair proposal?

TULLUS.

Be patient—Hear me speak—I have already
From Rome protected thee; Now from the Volsci,
From their just vengeance, I will still protect thee.
Retire. I will take care thou may'st with safety.

CORIOLANUS.

With safety!—Heav'ns!—And think'st thou, Coriolanus
Will stoop to thee for safety? No! my safeguard
Is in myself, a bosom void of blame,
And the great gods, protectors of the just.—
O 'tis an act of cowardice and baseness,
To seize the very time my hands were fetter'd,
By the strong chain of former obligations,
The safe sure moment to insult me—Gods!
Were I now free, as on that day I was,
When at Corioli I tam'd thy pride,
This had not been.

TULLUS.

Thou speak'st the truth: It had not.
O for that time again! Propitious gods,
If you will bless me, grant it!—Know, for that,
For that dear purpose, I have now propos'd
Thou should'st return. I pray thee, Marcius, do it!
And we shall meet again on nobler terms.

CORIOLANUS.

When to the Volsci I have clear'd my faith,
Doubt not I shall find means to meet thee nobly.
We then our generous quarrel may decide
In the bright front of some embattled field,
And not in private brawls, like fierce barbarians.

TULLUS.

Thou canst not hope acquittal from the Volsci.

CORIOLANUS.

I do: Nay more, expect their approbation,
Their thanks! I will obtain them such a peace
As thou durst never ask; a perfect union
Of their whole nation with imperial Rome
In all her privileges, all her rights.
By the just gods, I will! What would'st thou more?

TULLUS.

What would I more! Proud Roman; This I would;
Fire the curs'd forest where these Roman wolves
Haunt and infest their nobler neighbours round them;
Extirpate from the bosom of this land,
A false perfidious people, who, beneath
The mask of freedom, are a combination
Against the liberty of human-kind,
The genuine seed of outlaws and of robbers.

CORIOLANUS.

The seed of gods! 'Tis not for thee, vain boaster!
'Tis not for such as thou, so often spar'd
By her victorious sword, to talk of Rome,
But with respect and awful veneration.
Whate'er her blots, whate'er her giddy factions,

There is more virtue in one single year
Of Roman story, than your Volscian annals
Can boast thro' all your creeping dark duration!

TULLUS.

I thank thy rage. This full displays the traitor.

CORIOLANUS.

Ha! traitor!

TULLUS.

First, to thy own country, traitor!
And traitor, now, to mine!

CORIOLANUS.

Ye heavenly Powers!
I shall break loose—My rage—But let us part—
Lest my rash hand should do a hasty deed
My cooler thought forbids.

TULLUS.

Begone—Return—
To head the Roman troops. I grant thee quittance
Full and complete of all those obligations
Thou hast so oft insultingly complain'd
Fetter'd thy hands. They now are free. I court
The worst thy sword can do; whilst thou from me
Hast nothing to expect but sure destruction.
Quit then this hostile camp. Once more I tell thee,
Thou art not here one single hour in safety.

CORIOLANUS.

Think'st thou to fright me hence?

TULLUS.

Thou wilt not then?
Thou wilt not take the safety which I offer?

CORIOLANUS.

Till I have clear'd my honour in your council,
And prov'd before them all, to thy confusion,
The falsehood of thy charge; as soon in battle
I would before thee fly, and howl for mercy,
As quit the station they have here assign'd me.

TULLUS.

Volusius! Hoa!

SCENE III.

To them VOLUSIUS, *and Conspirators, with their swords drawn.*

TULLUS.

Seize and secure the traitor!

CORIOLANUS.

[*Laying his hand upon his sword.*

Who dares approach me, dies!

VOLUSIUS.

Die thou!

[*As* Coriolanus *draws his sword,* Volusius *and the Conspirators rush upon and stab him.* Tullus *standing by without having drawn his sword.*

CORIOLANUS.

[*Endeavouring to free himself.*

Off!—Villains!

[*Falling.*

O murdering slaves! Assassinating cowards! [*Dies.*

SCENE IV.

[*Upon the noise of the tumult, enter hastily to them* GALESUS, *the other deputies of the* Volscian *States, Officers, friends of* Coriolanus, *and* TITUS *with a large band of soldier.*

GALESUS.

[*As he enters.*

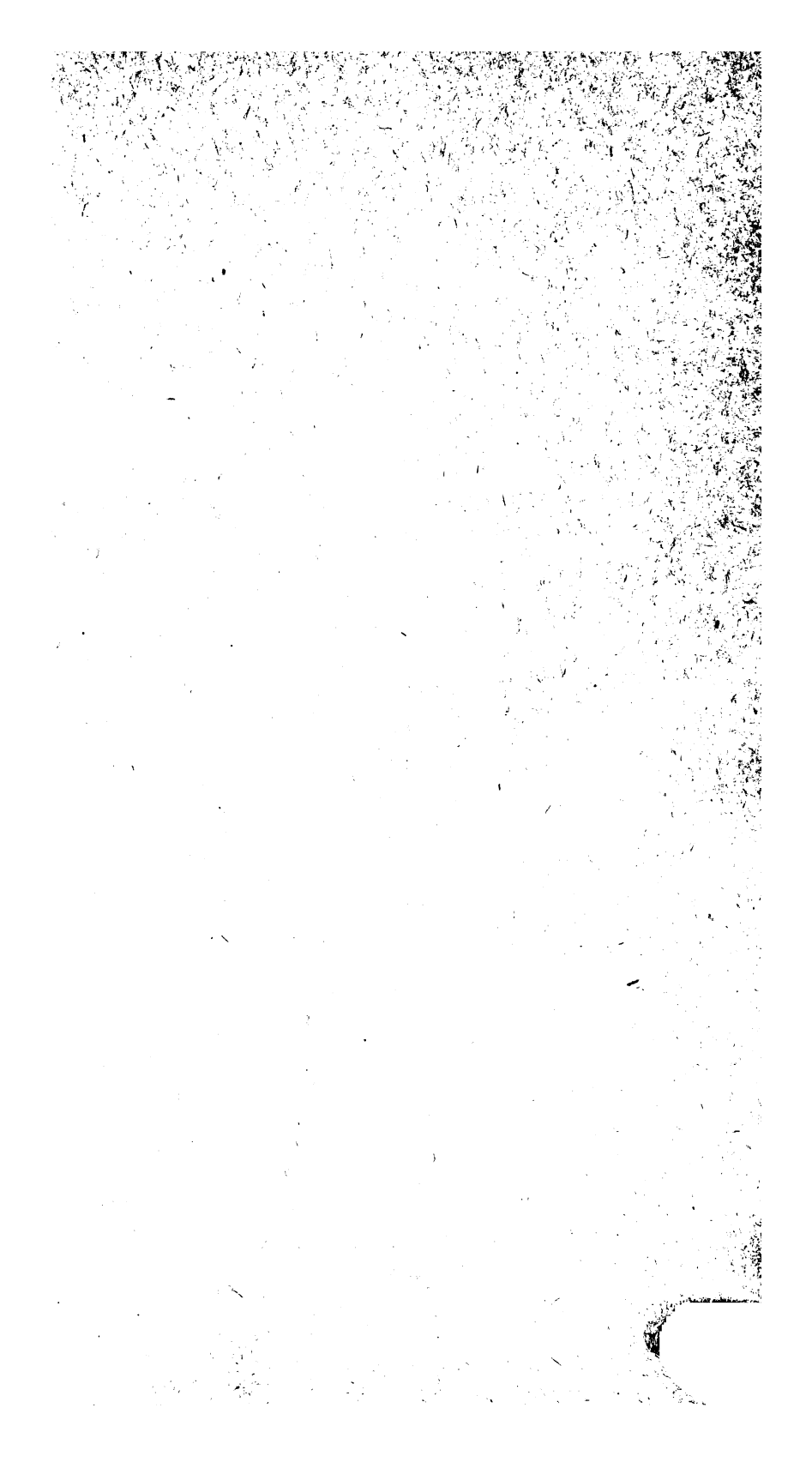
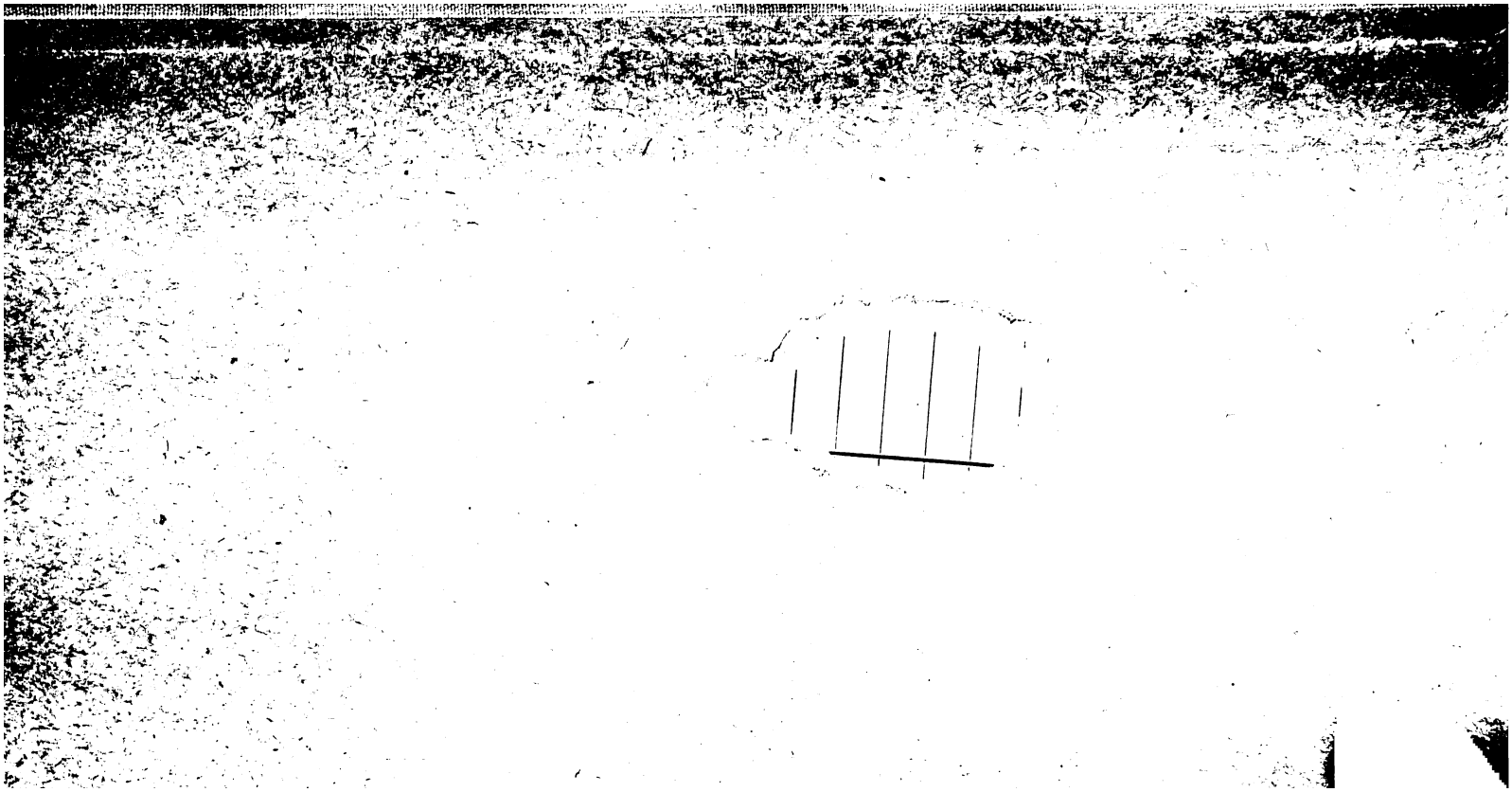
Are we a nation rul'd by laws, or fury?
How? whence this tumult?—— [*Pausing.*
Gods! what do I see?
The noble Marcius slain!

TULLUS.

You see a traitor
Punish'd as he deserv'd, the Roman yoke
That thrall'd us broken, and the Volsci free!

GALESUS.

Hear me, great Jove! Hear, all you injur'd Powers
Of friendship, hospitality, and faith!
By that heroic blood, which from the ground,
Reeking to you for vengeance cries, I swear!
This impious breach of your eternal laws,
This daring outrage on the Volscian honour,
Shall find in me a rigorous avenger!
On the same earth, polluted by their crime,
I will not live with these unpunish'd ruffians!

TULLUS.

This deed is mine: I claim it all!—These men,
These valiant men, were but my instruments,
To punish him who to our face betray'd us.